P. L. 123

Sintram and his Companions

and

Undine

The terrible stranger fled.—*p.* 133.

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SinTram and his Companions

and Undine

BY

DE LA MOTTE FOUQUÉ

WITH INTRODUCTION BY

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Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd.
London

CHEVY CHASE
CHILDRENS ROOM

FIFTH EDITION, NOV. 1930

Printed in Great Britain

634498

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LORTON Mar. 1 1939

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INTRODUCTION

FOUR Tales are, it is said, intended by the Author to be appropriate to the Four Seasons: the stern, grave *Sintram*, to winter; the tearful, smiling, fresh *Undine*, to spring; the torrid deserts of the *Two Captains*, to summer; and the sunset gold of *Aslauga's Knight*, to autumn. Of these two are before us.

The author of these tales, as well as of many more, was Friedrich, Baron de la Motte Fouqué, one of the foremost of the minstrels or tale-tellers of the realm of spiritual chivalry—the realm whither Arthur's knights departed when they "took the Sancgreal's holy quest,"—whence Spenser's Red Cross knight and his fellows came forth on their adventures, and in which the Knight of la Mancha believed, and endeavoured to exist.

La Motte Fouqué derived his name and his title from the French Huguenot ancestry, who had fled on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. His Christian name was taken from his godfather, Frederick the Great, of whom his father was a faithful friend, without compromising his religious principles and practice. Friedrich was born at Brandenburg on February 12, 1777, was educated by good parents at home, served in the Prussian army through

disaster and success, took an enthusiastic part in the rising of his country against Napoleon, inditing as many battle-songs as Körner. When victory was achieved, he dedicated his sword in the church of Neunhausen where his estate lay. He lived there, with his beloved wife and his imagination, till his death in 1843.

And all the time life was to him a poet's dream. He lived in a continual glamour of spiritual romance, bathing everything, from the old deities of the Valhalla down to the champions of German liberation, in an ideal glow of purity and nobleness, earnestly Christian throughout, even in his dealings with Northern mythology, for he saw Christ unconsciously shown in Baldur, and Satan in Loki.

Thus he lived, felt, and believed what he wrote, and though his dramas and poems do not rise above fair mediocrity, and the great number of his prose stories are injured by a certain monotony, the charm of them is in their elevation of sentiment and the earnest faith pervading all.

His knights might be Sir Galahad—

> "My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

Evil comes to them as something to be conquered, generally as a form of magic enchantment, and his "wondrous fair maidens" are worthy of them. Yet there is adventure enough to afford much pleasure, and often we have a touch of true genius, which has given actual ideas to the world, and precious ones.

This genius is especially traceable in his two masterpieces, Sintram and Undine. Sintram was inspired by Albert Dürer's engraving of the "Knight of Death," of which we give a presentation. It was sent to Fouqué by his friend Edward Hitzig, with a request that he would compose a ballad on it. The date of the engraving is 1513, and we

The Knight, Death, and Satan.
(*Albert Dürer.*)

quote the description given by the late Rev. R. St. John Tyrwhitt, showing how differently it may be read.

"Some say it is the end of the strong wicked man, just overtaken by Death and Sin, whom he has served on earth. It is said that the tuft on the lance indicates his murderous character, being of such unusual size. You know the use of that appendage was to prevent blood running down from the spearhead to the hands. They also think that the object under the horse's off hind foot is a snare, into which the old oppressor is to fall instantly. The expression of the faces may be taken either way : both good men and bad may have hard, regular features ; and both good men and bad would set their teeth grimly on seeing Death, with the sands of their life nearly run out. Some say they think the expression of Death gentle, or only admonitory (as the author of *Sintram*); and I have to thank the authoress of the *Heir of Redclyffe* for showing me a fine impression of the plate, where Death certainly had a not ungentle countenance—snakes and all. I think the shouldered lance, and quiet, firm seat on horseback, with gentle bearing on the curb-bit, indicate grave resolution in the rider, and that a robber knight would have his lance in rest ; then there is the leafy crown on the horse's head ; and the horse and dog move on so quietly, that I am inclined to hope the best for the Ritter."

Musing on the mysterious engraving, Fouqué saw in it the life-long companions of man, Death and Sin, whom he must defy in order to reach salvation ; and out of that contemplation rose his wonderful romance, not exactly an allegory, where every circumstance can be fitted with an appropriate meaning, but with the sense of the struggle of life, with external temptation and hereditary inclination pervading all, while Grace and Prayer aid the effort. Folko and Gabrielle are revived from the Magic Ring, that Folko may by example and influence enhance all higher resolu-

tions ; while Gabrielle, in all unconscious innocence, awakes the passions, and thus makes the conquest the harder.

It is within the bounds of possibility that the similarities of folk-lore may have brought to Fouqué's knowledge the outline of the story which Scott tells us was the germ of *Guy Mannering;* where a boy, whose horoscope had been drawn by an astrologer, as likely to encounter peculiar trials at certain intervals, actually had, in his twenty-first year, a sort of visible encounter with the Tempter, and came off conqueror by his strong faith in the Bible. Sir Walter, between reverence and realism, only took the earlier part of the story, but Fouqué gives us the positive struggle, and carries us along with the final victory and subsequent peace. His tale has had a remarkable power over the readers. We cannot but mention two remarkable instances at either end of the scale. Cardinal Newman, in his younger days, was so much overcome by it that he hurried out into the garden to read it alone, and returned with traces of emotion in his face. And when Charles Lowder read it to his East End boys, their whole minds seemed engrossed by it, and they even called certain spots after the places mentioned. Imagine the Rocks of the Moon in Ratcliff Highway !

May we mention that Miss Christabel Coleridge's *Waynflete* brings something of the spirit and idea of *Sintram* into modern life ?

Undine is a story of much lighter fancy, and full of a peculiar grace, though with a depth of melancholy that endears it. No doubt it was founded on the universal idea in folk-lore of the nixies or water-spirits, one of whom, in Norwegian legend, was seen weeping bitterly because of the want of a soul. Sometimes the nymph is a wicked siren like the Lorelei ; but in many of these tales she weds an earthly lover, and deserts him after a time, sometimes on finding her diving cap, or her seal-skin garment, which restores her to her ocean kindred, sometimes on his intruding on her

while she is under a periodical transformation, as with the fairy Melusine, more rarely if he becomes unfaithful.

There is a remarkable Cornish tale of a nymph or mermaiden, who thus vanished, leaving a daughter who loved to linger on the beach rather than sport with other children. By and by she had a lover, but no sooner did he show tokens of inconstancy, than the mother came up from the sea and put him to death, when the daughter pined away and died. Her name was Selina, which gives the tale a modern aspect, and makes us wonder if the old tradition can have been modified by some report of Undine's story.

There was an idea set forth by the Rosicrucians of spirits abiding in the elements, and as Undine represented the water influences, Fouqué's wife, the Baroness Caroline, wrote a fairly pretty story on the sylphs of fire. But Undine's freakish playfulness and mischief as an elemental being, and her sweet patience when her soul is won, are quite original, and indeed we cannot help sharing, or at least understanding, Huldbrand's beginning to shrink from the unearthly creature to something of his own flesh and blood. He is altogether unworthy, and though in this tale there is far less of spiritual meaning than in *Sintram*, we cannot but see that Fouqué's thought was that the grosser human nature is unable to appreciate what is absolutely pure and unearthly.

C. M. Yonge.

I

CHAPTER

IN the high castle of Drontheim many knights sat assembled to hold council for the weal of the realm; and joyously they caroused together till midnight around the huge stone table in the vaulted hall. A rising storm drove the snow wildly against the rattling windows; all the oak doors groaned, the massive locks shook, the castle-clock slowly and heavily struck the hour of one. Then a boy, pale as death, with disordered hair and closed eyes, rushed into the hall, uttering a wild scream of terror. He stopped beside the richly carved seat of the mighty Biorn, clung to the glittering knight with both his hands, and shrieked in a piercing voice, "Knight and father! father and knight! Death and another are closely pursuing me!"

An awful stillness lay like ice on the whole assembly, save that the boy screamed ever the fearful words. But one of Biorn's numerous retainers, an old esquire, known

by the name of Rolf the Good, advanced towards the terrified child, took him in his arms, and half chanted this prayer: "O Father, help Thy servant! I believe, and yet I cannot believe." The boy, as if in a dream, at once loosened his hold of the knight; and the good Rolf bore him from the hall unresisting, yet still shedding hot tears and murmuring confused sounds.

The lords and knights looked at one another much amazed, until the mighty Biorn said, wildly and fiercely laughing, "Marvel not at that strange boy. He is my only son; and has been thus since he was five years old: he is now twelve. I am therefore accustomed to see him so; though, at the first, I too was disquieted by it. The attack comes upon him only once in the year, and always at this same time. But forgive me for having spent so many words on my poor Sintram, and let us pass on to some worthier subject for our discourse."

Again there was silence for a while; then whisperingly and doubtfully single voices strove to renew their broken-off discourse, but without success. Two of the youngest and most joyous began a roundelay; but the storm howled and raged so wildly without, that this too was soon interrupted. And now they all sat silent and motionless in the lofty hall; the lamp flickered sadly under the vaulted roof; the whole party of knights looked like pale, lifeless images dressed up in gigantic armour.

Then arose the chaplain of the castle of Drontheim, the only priest among the knightly throng, and said, "Dear Lord Biorn, our eyes and thoughts have all been directed to you and your son in a wonderful manner; but so it has been ordered by the providence of God. You perceive that we cannot withdraw them; and you would do well to tell us exactly what you know concerning the fearful state of the boy. Perchance, the solemn tale, which I expect from you, might do good to this disturbed assembly."

Biorn cast a look of displeasure on the priest, and answered, "Sir chaplain, you have more share in the history than either you or I could desire. Excuse me, if I am unwilling to trouble these light-hearted warriors with so rueful a tale."

But the chaplain approached nearer to the knight, and said, in a firm yet very mild tone, "Dear lord, hitherto it rested with you alone to relate, or not to relate it; but now that you have so strangely hinted at the share which I have had in your son's calamity, I must positively demand that you will repeat word for word how everything came to pass. My honour will have it so, and that will weigh with you as much as with me."

In stern compliance Biorn bowed his haughty head, and began the following narration. "This time seven years I was keeping the Christmas feast with my assembled followers. We have many venerable old customs which have descended to us by inheritance from our great forefathers; as, for instance, that of placing a gilded boar's head on the table, and making thereon knightly vows of daring and wondrous deeds. Our chaplain here, who used then frequently to visit me, was never a friend to keeping up such traditions of the ancient heathen world. Such men as he were not much in favour in those olden times."

"My excellent predecessors," interrupted the chaplain, "belonged more to God than to the world, and with Him they were in favour. Thus they converted your ancestors; and if I can in like manner be of service to you, even your jeering will not vex me."

With looks yet darker, and a somewhat angry shudder, the knight resumed: "Yes, yes; I know all your promises and threats of an invisible Power, and how they are meant to persuade us to part more readily with whatever of this world's goods we may possess. Once, ah, truly, once I too had such! Strange!—Sometimes it seems to me as though

ages had passed over since then, and as if I were alone the survivor, so fearfully has everything changed. But now I bethink me, that the greater part of this noble company knew me in my happiness, and have seen my wife, my lovely Verena."

He pressed his hands on his eyes, and it seemed as though he wept. The storm had ceased; the soft light of the moon shone through the windows, and her beams played on his wild features. Suddenly he started up, so that his heavy armour rattled with a fearful sound, and he cried out in a thundering voice, "Shall I turn monk, as she has become a nun? No, crafty priest; your webs are too thin to catch flies of my sort."

"I have nothing to do with webs," said the chaplain. "In all openness and sincerity have I put heaven and hell before you during the space of six years; and you gave full consent to the step which the holy Verena took. But what all that has to do with your son's sufferings I know not, and I wait for your narration."

"You may wait long enough," said Biorn, with a sneer. "Sooner shall——"

"Swear not!" said the chaplain in a loud commanding tone, and his eyes flashed almost fearfully.

"Hurra!" cried Biorn, in wild affright; "hurra! Death and his companion are loose!" and he dashed madly out of the chamber and down the steps. The rough and fearful notes of his horn were heard summoning his retainers; and presently afterwards the clatter of horses' feet on the frozen court-yard gave token of their departure.

The knights retired, silent and shuddering; while the chaplain remained alone at the huge stone table, praying.

II
CHAPTER

AFTER some time the good Rolf returned with slow and soft steps, and started with surprise at finding the hall deserted. The chamber where he had been occupied in quieting and soothing the unhappy child was in so distant a part of the castle that he had heard nothing of the knight's hasty departure. The chaplain related to him all that had passed, and then said, "But, my good Rolf, I much wish to ask you concerning those strange words with which you seemed to lull poor Sintram to rest. They sounded like sacred words, and no doubt they are; but I could not understand them. 'I believe, and yet I cannot believe.'"

"Reverend sir," answered Rolf, "I remember that from my earliest years no history in the Gospels has taken such hold of me as that of the child possessed with a devil, which the disciples were not able to cast out; but when

our Saviour came down from the mountain where He had been transfigured, He broke the bonds wherewith the evil spirit had held the miserable child bound. I always felt as if I must have known and loved that boy, and been his play-fellow in his happy days; and when I grew older, then the distress of the father on account of his lunatic son lay heavy at my heart. It must surely have all been a foreboding of our poor young Lord Sintram, whom I love as if he were my own child; and now the words of the weeping father in the Gospel often come into my mind,—'Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief;' and something similar I may very likely have repeated to-day as a chant or a prayer. Reverend father, when I consider how one dreadful imprecation of the father has kept its withering hold on the son, all seems dark before me; but, God be praised! my faith and my hope remain above."

"Good Rolf," said the priest, "I cannot clearly understand what you say about the unhappy Sintram; for I do not know when and how this affliction came upon him. If no oath or solemn promise bind you to secrecy, will you make known to me all that is connected with it?"

"Most willingly," replied Rolf. "I have long desired to have an opportunity of so doing; but you have been almost always separated from us. I dare not now leave the sleeping boy any longer alone; and to-morrow, at the earliest dawn, I must take him to his father. Will you come with me, dear sir, to our poor Sintram?"

The chaplain at once took up the small lamp which Rolf had brought with him, and they set off together through the long vaulted passages. In the small distant chamber they found the poor boy fast asleep. The light of the lamp fell strangely on his very pale face. The chaplain stood gazing at him for some time, and at length said: "Certainly from his birth his features were always sharp and strongly marked, but now they are almost fearfully so for

such a child; and yet no one can help having a kindly feeling towards him, whether he will or not."

"Most true, dear sir," answered Rolf. And it was evident how his whole heart rejoiced at any word which betokened affection for his beloved young lord. Thereupon he placed the lamp where its light could not disturb the boy, and seating himself close by the priest, he began to speak in the following terms:—"During that Christmas feast of which my lord was talking to you, he and his followers discoursed much concerning the German merchants, and the best means of keeping down the increasing pride and power of the trading-towns. At length Biorn laid his impious hand on the golden boar's head, and swore to put to death without mercy every German trader whom fate, in what way soever, might bring alive into his power. The gentle Verena turned pale, and would have interposed —but it was too late, the bloody word was uttered. And immediately afterwards, as though the great enemy of souls were determined at once to secure with fresh bonds the vassal thus devoted to him, a warder came into the hall to announce that two citizens of a trading-town in Germany, an old man and his son, had been shipwrecked on this coast, and were now within the gates, asking hospitality of the lord of the castle. The knight could not refrain from shuddering; but he thought himself bound by his rash vow and by that accursed heathenish golden boar. We, his retainers, were commanded to assemble in the castle-yard, armed with sharp spears, which were to be hurled at the defenceless strangers at the first signal made to us. For the first, and I trust the last time in my life, I said 'No' to the commands of my lord; and that I said in a loud voice, and with the heartiest determination. The Almighty, who alone knows whom He will accept and whom He will reject, armed me with resolution and strength. And Biorn might perceive whence the refusal of his faithful old servant arose,

and that it was worthy of respect. He said to me, half in anger and half in scorn: 'Go up to my wife's apartments; her attendants are running to and fro, perhaps she is ill. Go up, Rolf the Good, I say to thee, and so women shall be with women.' I thought to myself, 'Jeer on, then;' and I went silently the way that he had pointed out to me. On the stairs there met me two strange and right fearful beings, whom I had never seen before; and I know not how they got into the castle. One of them was a great tall man, frightfully pallid and thin; the other was a dwarf-like man, with a most hideous countenance and features. Indeed, when I collected my thoughts and looked carefully at him, it appeared to me——"

Low moanings and convulsive movements of the boy here interrupted the narrative. Rolf and his chaplain hastened to his bedside, and perceived that his countenance wore an expression of fearful agony, and that he was struggling in vain to open his eyes. The priest made the Sign of the Cross over him, and immediately peace seemed to be restored, and his sleep again became quiet: they both returned softly to their seats.

"You see," said Rolf, "that it will not do to describe more closely those two awful beings. Suffice it to say, that they went down into the court-yard, and that I proceeded to my lady's apartments. I found the gentle Verena almost fainting with terror and overwhelming anxiety, and I hastened to restore her with some of those remedies which I was able to apply by my skill, through God's gift and the healing virtues of herbs and minerals. But scarcely had she recovered her senses, when, with that calm holy power which, as you know, is hers, she desired me to conduct her down to the court-yard, saying that she must either put a stop to the fearful doings of this night, or herself fall a sacrifice. Our way took us by the little bed of the sleeping Sintram. Alas! hot tears fell from

my eyes to see how evenly his gentle breath then came and went, and how sweetly he smiled in his peaceful slumbers."

The old man put his hands to his eyes, and wept bitterly; but soon he resumed his sad story. "As we approached the lowest window of the staircase, we could hear distinctly the voice of the elder merchant; and on looking out, the light of the torches showed me his noble features, as well as the bright youthful countenance of his son. 'I take Almighty God to witness,' cried he, 'that I had no evil thought against this house! But surely I must have fallen unawares amongst heathens; it cannot be that I am in a Christian knight's castle; and if you are indeed heathens, then kill us at once. And thou, my beloved son, be patient and of good courage; in heaven we shall learn wherefore it could not be otherwise.' I thought I could see those two fearful ones amidst the throng of retainers. The pale one had a huge curved sword in his hand, the little one held a spear notched in a strange fashion. Verena tore open the window, and cried in silvery tones through the wild night, 'My dearest lord and husband, for the sake of your only child, have pity on those harmless men! Save them from death, and resist the temptation of the evil spirit.' The knight answered in his fierce wrath—but I cannot repeat his words. He staked his child on the desperate cast; he called Death and the Devil to see that he kept his word:—but hush! the boy is again moaning. Let me bring the dark tale quickly to a close. Biorn commanded his followers to strike, casting on them those fierce looks which have gained him the title of Biorn of the Fiery Eyes; while at the same time the two frightful strangers bestirred themselves very busily. Then Verena called out, with piercing anguish, 'Help, O God, my Saviour!' Those two dreadful figures disappeared; and the knight and his retainers, as if seized with blindness, rushed wildly one against the other,

but without doing injury to themselves, or yet being able to strike the merchants, who ran so close a risk. They bowed reverently towards Verena, and with calm thanksgivings departed through the castle-gates, which at that moment had been burst open by a violent gust of wind, and now gave a free passage to any who would go forth. The lady and I were yet standing bewildered on the stairs, when I fancied I saw the two fearful forms glide close by me, but mist-like and unreal. Verena called to me: 'Rolf, did you see a tall pale man, and a little hideous one with him, pass just now up the staircase?' I flew after them; and found, alas, the poor boy in the same state in which you saw him a few hours ago. Ever since, the attack has come on him regularly at this time, and he is in all respects fearfully changed. The lady of the castle did not fail to discern the avenging hand of Heaven in this calamity; and as the knight, her husband, instead of repenting, ever became more truly Biorn of the Fiery Eyes, she resolved, in the walls of a cloister, by unremitting prayer, to obtain mercy in time and eternity for herself and her unhappy child."

Rolf was silent; and the chaplain, after some thought, said: "I now understand why, six years ago, Biorn confessed his guilt to me in general words, and consented that his wife should take the veil. Some faint compunction must then have stirred within him, and perhaps may stir him yet. At any rate it was impossible that so tender a flower as Verena could remain longer in so rough keeping. But who is there now to watch over and protect our poor Sintram?"

"The prayer of his mother," answered Rolf. "Reverend sir, when the first dawn of day appears, as it does now, and when the morning breeze whispers through the glancing window, they ever bring to my mind the soft beaming eyes of my lady, and I again seem to hear the sweet tones of

her voice. The holy Verena is, next to God, our chief aid."

"And let us add our devout supplications to the Lord," said the chaplain; and he and Rolf knelt in silent and earnest prayer by the bed of the pale sufferer, who began to smile in his dreams.

III

CHAPTER

THE rays of the sun shining brightly into the room awoke Sintram, and raising himself up, he looked angrily at the chaplain, and said, "So there is a priest in the castle! And yet that accursed dream continues to torment me even in his very presence. Pretty priest he must be!"

"My child," answered the chaplain in the mildest tone, "I have prayed for thee most fervently, and I shall never cease doing so—but God alone is Almighty."

"You speak very boldly to the son of the knight Biorn," cried Sintram. "'My child!' If those horrible dreams had not been again haunting me, you would make me laugh heartily."

"Young Lord Sintram," said the chaplain, "I am by no means surprised that you do not know me again; for in

truth, neither do I know you again." And his eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

The good Rolf looked sorrowfully in the boy's face, saying, "Ah, my dear young master, you are so much better than you would make people believe. Why do you that? Your memory is so good, that you must surely recollect your kind old friend the chaplain, who used formerly to be constantly at the castle, and to bring you so many gifts—bright pictures of saints, and beautiful songs?"

"I know all that very well," replied Sintram thoughtfully. "My sainted mother was alive in those days."

"Our gracious lady is still living, God be praised," said the good Rolf.

"But she does not live for us, poor sick creatures that we are!" cried Sintram. "And why will you not call her sainted? Surely she knows nothing about my dreams?"

"Yes, she does know of them," said the chaplain; "and she prays to God for you. But take heed, and restrain that wild, haughty temper of yours. It might, indeed, come to pass that she would know nothing about your dreams, and that would be if your soul were separated from your body; and then the holy angels also would cease to know anything of you."

Sintram fell back on his bed as if thunderstruck; and Rolf said, with a gentle sigh, "You should not speak so severely to my poor sick child, reverend sir."

The boy sat up, and with tearful eyes he turned caressingly towards the chaplain: "Let him do as he pleases, you good, tender-hearted Rolf; he knows very well what he is about. Would you reprove him if I were slipping down a snow-cleft, and he caught me up roughly by the hair of my head?"

The priest looked tenderly at him, and would have spoken his holy thoughts, when Sintram suddenly sprang

off the bed and asked after his father. As soon as he heard of the knight's departure, he would not remain another hour in the castle ; and put aside the fears of the chaplain and the old esquire, lest a rapid journey should injure his hardly restored health, by saying to them, "Believe me, reverend sir, and dear old Rolf, if I were not subject to these hideous dreams, there would not be a bolder youth in the whole world ; and even as it is, I am not so far behind the very best. Besides, till another year has passed, my dreams are at an end."

On his somewhat imperious sign Rolf brought out the horses. The boy threw himself boldly into the saddle, and taking a courteous leave of the chaplain, he dashed along the frozen valley that lay between the snow-clad mountains. He had not ridden far, in company with his old attendant, when he heard a strange indistinct sound proceeding from a neighbouring cleft in the rock ; it was partly like the clapper of a small mill, but mingled with that were hollow groans and other tones of distress. Thither they turned their horses, and a wonderful sight showed itself to them.

A tall man, deadly pale, in a pilgrim's garb, was striving with violent though unsuccessful efforts, to work his way out of the snow and to climb up the mountain ; and thereby a quantity of bones, which were hanging loosely all about his garments, rattled one against the other, and caused the mysterious sound already mentioned. Rolf, much terrified, crossed himself, while the bold Sintram called out to the stranger, "What art thou doing there? Give an account of thy solitary labours."

"I live in death," replied that other one with a fearful grin.

"Whose are those bones on thy clothes?"

"They are relics, young sir."

"Art thou a pilgrim?"

"Restless, quietless, I wander up and down."

"Thou must not perish here in the snow before my eyes."

"That I will not."

"Thou must come up and sit on my horse."

"That I will." And all at once he started up out of the snow with surprising strength and agility, and sat on the horse behind Sintram, clasping him tight in his long arms. The horse, startled by the rattling of the bones, and as if seized with madness, rushed away through the most trackless passes. The boy soon found himself alone with his strange companion; for Rolf, breathless with fear, spurred on his horse in vain, and remained far behind them. From a snowy precipice the horse slid, without falling, into a narrow gorge, somewhat indeed exhausted, yet continuing to snort and foam as before, and still unmastered by the boy. Yet his headlong course being now changed into a rough irregular trot, Sintram was able to breathe more freely, and to begin the following discourse with his unknown companion.

"Draw thy garment closer around thee, thou pale man, so the bones will not rattle, and I shall be able to curb my horse."

"It would be of no avail, boy; it would be of no avail. The bones must rattle."

"Do not clasp me so tight with thy long arms, they are so cold."

"It cannot be helped, boy; it cannot be helped. Be content. For my long cold arms are not pressing yet on thy heart."

"Do not breathe on me so with thy icy breath. All my strength is departing."

"I must breathe, boy; I must breathe. But do not complain. I am not blowing thee away."

The strange dialogue here came to an end; for to Sintram's surprise he found himself on an open plain, over

which the sun was shining brightly, and at no great distance before him he saw his father's castle. While he was thinking whether he might invite the unearthly pilgrim to rest there, this one put an end to his doubts by throwing himself suddenly off the horse, whose wild course was checked by the shock. Raising his forefinger, he said to the boy, "I know old Biorn of the Fiery Eyes well; perhaps but too well. Commend me to him. It will not need to tell him my name; he will recognize me at the description." So saying, the ghastly stranger turned aside into a thick fir-wood, and disappeared rattling amongst the tangled branches.

Slowly and thoughtfully Sintram rode on towards his father's castle, his horse now again quiet and altogether exhausted. He scarcely knew how much he ought to relate of his wonderful journey, and he also felt oppressed with anxiety for the good Rolf, who had remained so far behind. He found himself at the castle-gate sooner than he had expected; the drawbridge was lowered, the doors were thrown open; an attendant led the youth into the great hall, where Biorn was sitting all alone at a huge table, with many flagons and glasses before him, and suits of armour ranged on either side of him. It was his daily custom, by way of company, to have the armour of his ancestors, with closed visors, placed all round the table at which he sat. The father and son began conversing as follows:

"Where is Rolf?"

"I do not know, father; he left me in the mountains."

"I will have Rolf shot if he cannot take better care than that of my only child."

"Then, father, you will have your only child shot at the same time, for without Rolf I cannot live; and if even one single dart is aimed at him, I will be there to receive it, and to shield his true and faithful heart."

"So!—Then Rolf shall not be shot, but he shall be driven from the castle."

"In that case, father, you will see me go away also; and I will give myself up to serve him in forests, in mountains, in caves."

"So!—Well, then, Rolf must remain here."

"That is just what I think, father."

"Were you riding quite alone?"

"No, father; but with a strange pilgrim. He said that he knew you very well—perhaps too well." And thereupon Sintram began to relate and to describe all that had passed with the pale man.

"I know him also very well," said Biorn. "He is half crazed and half wise, as we sometimes are astonished at seeing that people can be. But do thou, my boy, go to rest after thy wild journey. I give you my word that Rolf shall be kindly received if he arrive here; and that if he do not come soon, he shall be sought for in the mountains."

"I trust to your word, father," said Sintram, half humble, half proud; and he did after the command of the grim lord of the castle.

IV
CHAPTER

TOWARDS evening Sintram awoke. He saw the good Rolf sitting at his bedside, and looked up in the old man's kind face with a smile of unusually innocent brightness. But soon again his dark brows were knit, and he asked, "How did my father receive you, Rolf? Did he say a harsh word to you?"

"No, my dear young lord, he did not; indeed he did not speak to me at all. At first he looked very wrathful; but he checked himself, and ordered a servant to bring me food and wine to refresh me, and afterwards to take me to your room."

"He might have kept his word better. But he is my father, and I must not judge him too hardly. I will now go down to the evening meal." So saying, he sprang up and threw on his furred mantle.

But Rolf stopped him, and said, entreatingly: "My dear young master, you would do better to take your meal to-day alone here in your own apartment; for there is a guest with your father, in whose company I should be very sorry to see you. If you will remain here, I will entertain you with pleasant tales and songs."

"There is nothing in the world which I should like better, dear Rolf," answered Sintram; "but it does not befit me to shun any man. Tell me, whom should I find with my father?"

"Alas!" said the old man, "you have already found him in the mountain. Formerly, when I used to ride about the country with Biorn, we often met with him, but I was forbidden to tell you anything about him; and this is the first time that he has ever come to the castle."

"The crazy pilgrim!" replied Sintram; and he stood awhile in deep thought, as if considering the matter. At last, rousing himself, he said, "Dear old friend, I would most willingly stay here this evening all alone with you and your stories and songs, and all the pilgrims in the world should not entice me from this quiet room. But one thing must be considered. I feel a kind of dread of that pale, tall man; and by such fears no knight's son can ever suffer himself to be overcome. So be not angry, dear Rolf, if I determine to go and look that strange palmer in the face." And he shut the door of the chamber behind him, and with firm and echoing steps proceeded to the hall.

The pilgrim and the knight were sitting opposite to each other at the great table, on which many lights were burning; and it was fearful, amongst all the lifeless armour, to see those two tall grim men move, and eat, and drink.

As the pilgrim looked up on the boy's entrance, Biorn said: "You know him already: he is my only child, and your fellow-traveller this morning."

The palmer fixed an earnest look on Sintram, and answered, shaking his head, "I know not what you mean."

Then the boy burst forth, impatiently, "It must be confessed that you deal very unfairly by us! You say that you know my father but too much, and now it seems that you know me altogether too little. Look me in the face: who allowed you to ride on his horse, and in return had his good steed driven almost wild? Speak, if you can!"

Biorn smiled, shaking his head, but well pleased, as was his wont, with his son's wild behaviour; while the pilgrim shuddered as if terrified and overcome by some fearful irresistible power. At length, with a trembling voice, he said these words: "Yes, yes, my dear young lord, you are surely quite right; you are perfectly right in everything which you may please to assert."

Then the lord of the castle laughed aloud, and said: "Why, thou strange pilgrim, what is become of all thy wonderfully fine speeches and warnings now? Has the boy all at once struck thee dumb and powerless? Beware, thou prophet-messenger, beware!"

But the palmer cast a fearful look on Biorn, which seemed to quench the light of his fiery eyes, and said solemnly, in a thundering voice, "Between me and thee, old man, the case stands quite otherwise. We have nothing to reproach each other with. And now suffer me to sing a song to you on the lute." He stretched out his hand, and took down from the wall a forgotten and half-strung lute, which was hanging there; and, with surprising skill and rapidity, having put it in a state fit for use, he struck some chords, and raised this song to the low melancholy tones of the instrument:

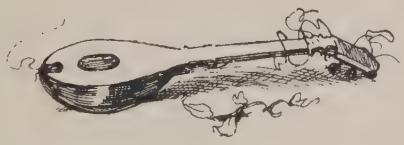
"The flow'ret was mine own, mine own,
But I have lost its fragrance rare,
And knightly name and freedom fair,
Through sin, through sin alone.

The flow'ret was thine own, thine own,
Why cast away what thou didst win?
Thou knight no more, but slave of sin,
Thou'rt fearfully alone!"

"Have a care!" shouted he at the close in a pealing voice, as he pulled the strings so mightily that they all broke with a clanging wail, and a cloud of dust rose from the old lute, which spread round him like a mist.

Sintram had been watching him narrowly whilst he was singing, and more and more did he feel convinced that it was impossible that this man and his fellow-traveller of the morning could be one and the same. Nay, the doubt rose to certainty, when the stranger again looked round at him with the same timid, anxious air, and with many excuses and low reverences hung the lute in its old place, and then ran out of the hall as if bewildered with terror, in strange contrast with the proud and stately bearing which he had shown to Biorn.

The eyes of the boy were now directed to his father, and he saw that he had sunk back senseless in his seat, as if struck by a blow. Sintram's cries called Rolf and other attendants into the hall; and only by great labour did their united efforts awake the lord of the castle. His looks were still wild and disordered; but he allowed himself to be taken to rest, quiet and yielding.



V
CHAPTER

AN illness followed this sudden attack; and during the course of it the stout old knight, in the midst of his delirious ravings, did not cease to affirm confidently that he must and should recover. He laughed proudly when his fever-fits came on, and rebuked them for daring to attack him so needlessly. Then he murmured to himself, "That was not the right one yet; there must still be another one out in the cold mountains."

Always at such words Sintram involuntarily shuddered; they seemed to strengthen his notion that he who had ridden with him, and he who had sat at table in the castle, were two quite distinct persons; and he knew not why, but this thought was inexpressibly awful to him.

Biorn recovered, and appeared to have entirely forgotten

his adventure with the palmer. He hunted in the mountains; he carried on his usual wild warfare with his neighbours; and Sintram, as he grew up, became his almost constant companion; whereby each year a fearful strength of body and spirit was unfolded in the youth. Every one trembled at the sight of his sharp pallid features, his dark rolling eyes, his tall, muscular, and somewhat lean form; and yet no one hated him—not even those whom he distressed or injured in his wildest humours. This might arise in part out of regard to old Rolf, who seldom left him for long, and who always held a softening influence over him; but also many of those who had known the Lady Verena while she still lived in the world, affirmed that a faint reflection of her heavenly expression floated over the very unlike features of her son, and that by this their hearts were won.

Once, just at the beginning of spring, Biorn and his son were hunting in the neighbourhood of the sea-coast, over a tract of country which did not belong to them; drawn thither less by the love of sport than by the wish of bidding defiance to a chieftain whom they detested, and thus exciting a feud. At that season of the year, when his winter dreams had just passed off, Sintram was always unusually fierce and disposed for warlike adventures. And this day he was enraged at the chieftain for not coming in arms from his castle to hinder their hunting; and he cursed, in the wildest words, his tame patience and love of peace. Just then one of his wild young companions rushed towards him, shouting joyfully: "Be content, my dear young lord! I will wager that all is coming about as we and you wish; for as I was pursuing a wounded deer down to the sea-shore, I saw a sail and a vessel filled with armed men making for the shore. Doubtless your enemy purposes to fall upon you from the coast."

Joyfully and secretly Sintram called all his followers

together, being resolved this time to take the combat on himself alone, and then to rejoin his father, and astonish him with the sight of captured foes and other tokens of victory.

The hunters, thoroughly acquainted with every cliff and rock on the coast, hid themselves round the landing-place; and soon the strange vessel hove nearer with swelling sails, till at length it came to anchor, and its crew began to disembark in unsuspicious security. At the head of them appeared a knight of high degree, in blue steel armour richly inlaid with gold. His head was bare, for he carried his costly golden helmet hanging on his left arm. He looked royally around him; and his countenance, which dark brown locks shaded, was pleasant to behold; and a well-trimmed moustache fringed his mouth, from which, as he smiled, gleamed forth two rows of pearl-white teeth.

A feeling came across Sintram that he must already have seen this knight somewhere; and he stood motionless for a few moments. But suddenly he raised his hand, to make the agreed signal of attack. In vain did the good Rolf, who had just succeeded in getting up to him, whisper in his ear that these could not be the foes whom he had taken them for, but that they were unknown, and certainly high and noble strangers.

"Let them be who they may," replied the wild youth, "they have enticed me here to wait, and they shall pay the penalty of thus fooling me. Say not another word, if you value your life." And immediately he gave the signal, a thick shower of javelins followed from all sides, and the Norwegian warriors rushed forth with flashing swords. They found their foes as brave, or somewhat braver, than they could have desired. More fell on the side of those who made than of those who received the assault; and the strangers appeared to understand sur-

prisingly the Norwegian manner of fighting. The knight in steel armour had not in his haste put on his helmet; but it seemed as if he in no wise needed such protection, for his good sword afforded him sufficient defence even against the spears and darts which were incessantly hurled at him, as with rapid skill he received them on the shining blade, and dashed them far away, shivered into fragments.

Sintram could not at the first onset penetrate to where this shining hero was standing, as all his followers, eager after such a noble prey, thronged closely round him; but now the way was cleared enough for him to spring towards the brave stranger, shouting a war-cry, and brandishing his sword above his head.

"Gabrielle!" cried the knight, as he dexterously parried the heavy blow which was descending, and with one powerful sword-thrust he laid the youth prostrate on the ground; then placing his knee on Sintram's breast, he drew forth a flashing dagger, and held it before his eyes as he lay astonished. All at once the men-at-arms stood round like walls. Sintram felt that no hope remained for him. He determined to die as it became a bold warrior; and without giving one sign of emotion, he looked on the fatal weapon with a steady gaze.

As he lay with his eyes cast upwards, he fancied that there appeared suddenly from heaven a wondrously beautiful female form in a bright attire of blue and gold. "Our ancestors told truly of the Valkyrias," murmured he. "Strike, then, thou unknown conqueror."

But with this the knight did not comply, neither was it a Valkyria who had so suddenly appeared, but the beautiful wife of the stranger, who, having advanced to the high edge of the vessel, had thus met the upraised look of Sintram.

"Folko," cried she, in the softest tone, "thou knight without reproach! I know that thou sparest the vanquished."

The knight sprang up, and with courtly grace stretched out his hand to the conquered youth, saying, "Thank the noble lady of Montfaucon for your life and liberty. But if you are so totally devoid of all goodness as to wish to resume the combat, here am I; let it be yours to begin."

Sintram sank, deeply ashamed, on his knees, and wept; for he had often heard speak of the high renown of the French knight Folko of Montfaucon, who was related to his father's house, and of the grace and beauty of his gentle lady Gabrielle.

VI
CHAPTER

THE Lord of Montfaucon looked with astonishment at his strange foe; and as he gazed on him more and more, recollections arose in his mind of that northern race from whom he was descended, and with whom he had always maintained friendly relations. A golden bear's claw, with which Sintram's cloak was fastened, at length made all clear to him.

"Have you not," said he, "a valiant and far-famed kinsman, called the Sea-king Arinbiorn, who carries on his helmet golden vulture-wings? And is not your father the knight Biorn? For surely the bear's claw on your mantle must be the cognisance of your house."

Sintram assented to all this, in deep and humble shame.

The Knight of Montfaucon raised him from the ground, and said gravely, yet gently, "We are, then, of kin the one to the other; but I could never have believed that any one of our noble house would attack a peaceful man without provocation, and that, too, without giving warning."

"Slay me at once," answered Sintram, "if indeed I am worthy to die by so noble hands. I can no longer endure the light of day."

"Because you have been overcome?" asked Montfaucon.

Sintram shook his head.

"Or is it, rather, because you have committed an unknightly action?"

The glow of shame that overspread the youth's countenance said yes to this.

"But you should not on that account wish to die," continued Montfaucon. "You should rather wish to live, that you may prove your repentance, and make your name illustrious by many noble deeds; for you are endowed with a bold spirit and with strength of limb, and also with the eagle-glance of a chieftain. I should have made you a knight this very hour, if you had borne yourself as bravely in a good cause as you have just now in a bad. See to it, that I may do it soon. You may yet become a vessel of high honour."

A joyous sound of shawms and silver rebecks interrupted his discourse. The lady Gabrielle, bright as the morning, had now come down from the ship, surrounded by her maidens; and, instructed in a few words by Folko who was his late foe, she took the combat as some mere trial of arms, saying, "You must not be cast down, noble youth, because my wedded lord has won the prize; for be it known to you, that in the whole world there is but one knight who can boast of not having been overcome by the Baron of Montfaucon. And who can say," continued she, sportively,

"whether even that would have happened, had he not set himself to win back the magic ring from me, his lady-love, destined to him, as well by the choice of my own heart as by the will of Heaven!"

Folko, smiling, bent his head over the snow-white hand of his lady; and then bade the youth conduct them to his father's castle.

Rolf took upon himself to see to the disembarking of the horses and valuables of the strangers, filled with joy at the thought that an angel in woman's form had appeared to soften his beloved young master, and perhaps even to free him from that early curse.

Sintram sent messengers in all directions to seek for his father, and to announce to him the arrival of his noble guests. They therefore found the old knight in his castle, with everything prepared for their reception. Gabrielle could not enter the vast dark-looking building without a slight shudder, which was increased when she saw the rolling fiery eyes of its lord; even the pale, dark-haired Sintram seemed to her very fearful; and she sighed to herself, "Oh! what an awful abode have you brought me to visit, my knight! Would that we were once again in my sunny Gascony, or in your knightly Normandy!"

But the grave yet courteous reception, the deep respect paid to her grace and beauty, and to the high fame of Folko, helped to re-assure her; and soon her bird-like pleasure in novelties was awakened through the strange significant appearance of this new world. And besides, it could only be for a passing moment that any womanly fears found a place in her breast when her lord was near at hand, for well did she know what effectual protection that brave Baron was ever ready to afford to all those who were dear to him, or committed to his charge.

Soon afterwards Rolf passed through the great hall in which Biorn and his guests were seated, conducting their

attendants, who had charge of the baggage, to their rooms. Gabrielle caught sight of her favourite lute, and desired a page to bring it to her, that she might see if the precious instrument had been injured by the sea-voyage. As she bent over it with earnest attention, and her taper fingers ran up and down the strings, a smile, like the dawn of spring, passed over the dark countenances of Biorn and his son; and both said, with an involuntary sigh, "Ah! if you would but play on that lute, and sing to it! It would be but too beautiful!" The lady looked up at them, well pleased, and smiling her assent, she began this song:—

"Songs and flowers are returning,
And radiant skies of May,
Earth her choicest gifts is yielding,
But one is past away.

The spring that clothes with tend'rest green
Each grove and sunny plain,
Shines not for my forsaken heart,
Brings not my joys again.

Warble not so, thou nightingale,
Upon thy blooming spray,
Thy sweetness now will burst my heart,
I cannot bear thy lay.

For flowers and birds are come again,
And breezes mild of May,
But treasured hopes and golden hours
Are lost to me for aye!"

The two Norwegians sat plunged in melancholy thought; but especially Sintram's eyes began to brighten with a milder expression, his cheeks glowed, every feature softened, till those who looked at him could have fancied they saw a glorified spirit. The good Rolf, who had stood listening to the song, rejoiced thereat from his heart, and devoutly raised his hands in pious gratitude to heaven. But

Gabrielle's astonishment suffered her not to take her eyes from Sintram. At last she said to him, "I should much like to know what has so struck you in that little song. It is merely a simple lay of the spring, full of the images which that sweet season never fails to call up in the minds of my countrymen."

"But is your home really so lovely, so wondrously rich in song?" cried the enraptured Sintram. "Then I am no longer surprised at your heavenly beauty, at the power which you exercise over my hard, wayward heart! For a paradise of song must surely send such angelic messengers through the ruder parts of the world." And so saying, he fell on his knees before the lady in an attitude of deep humility. Folko looked on all the while with an approving smile, whilst Gabrielle, in much embarrassment, seemed hardly to know how to treat the half-wild, half-tamed young stranger. After some hesitation, however, she held out her fair hand to him, and said as she gently raised him: "Surely one who listens with such delight to music must himself know how to awaken its strains. Take my lute, and let us hear a graceful inspired song."

But Sintram drew back, and would not take the instrument; and he said, "Heaven forbid that my rough untutored hand should touch those delicate strings! For even were I to begin with some soft strains, yet before long the wild spirit which dwells in me would break out, and there would be an end of the form and sound of the beautiful instrument. No, no; suffer me rather to fetch my own huge harp, strung with bears' sinews set in brass, for in truth I do feel myself inspired to play and sing."

Gabrielle murmured a half-frightened assent; and Sintram having quickly brought his harp, began to strike it loudly, and to sing these words with a voice no less powerful:

"Sir knight, sir knight, oh! whither away
With thy snow-white sail on the foaming spray?"
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"Too long have I trod upon ice and snow;
I seek the bowers where roses blow."
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

He steer'd on his course by night and day
Till he cast his anchor in Naples Bay.
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

There wander'd a lady upon the strand,
Her fair hair bound with a golden band.
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"Hail to thee! hail to thee! lady bright,
Mine own shalt thou be ere morning light."
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"Not so, sir knight," the lady replied,
"For you speak to the margrave's chosen bride."
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"Your lover may come with his shield and spear,
And the victor shall win thee, lady dear!"
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"Nay, seek for another bride, I pray;
Most fair are the maidens of Naples Bay."
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

"No, lady; for thee my heart doth burn,
And the world cannot now my purpose turn."
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

Then came the young margrave, bold and brave;
But low was he laid in a grassy grave.
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

And then the fierce Northman joyously cried,
"Now shall I possess lands, castle, and bride!"
Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers!

Sintram's song was ended, but his eyes glared wildly, and the vibrations of the harp-strings still resounded in a

marvellous manner. Biorn's attitude was again erect; he stroked his long beard and rattled his sword, as if in great delight at what he had just heard. Much shuddered Gabrielle before the wild song and these strange forms, but only till she cast a glance on the Lord of Montfaucon, who sat there smiling in all his hero strength, unmoved, while the rough uproar passed by him like an autumnal storm.

VII
CHAPTER

SOME weeks after this, in the twilight of evening, Sintram, very disturbed, came down to the castle-garden. Although the presence of Gabrielle never failed to soothe and calm him, yet if she left the apartment for even a few instants, the fearful wildness of his spirit seemed to return with renewed strength. So even now, after having long and kindly read legends of the olden times to his father Biorn, she had retired to her chamber. The tones of her lute could be distinctly heard in the garden below; but the sounds only drove the bewildered youth more impetuously through the shades of the ancient elms. Stooping suddenly to avoid some overhanging branches, he unexpectedly came upon something against which he had almost struck, and which, at first sight, he took for a small bear standing on its hind legs, with a long and strangely crooked horn on

its head. He drew back in surprise and fear. It addressed him in a grating man's voice: "Well, my brave young knight, whence come you? whither go you? wherefore so terrified?" And then first he saw that he had before him a little old man so wrapped up in a rough garment of fur, that scarcely one of his features was visible, and wearing in his cap a strange-looking long feather.

"But whence come *you?* and whither go *you?*" returned the angry Sintram. "For of you such questions should be asked. What have you to do in our domains, you hideous little being?"

"Well, well," sneered the other one, "I am thinking that I am quite big enough as I am—one cannot always be a giant. And as to the rest, why should you find fault that I go here hunting for snails? Surely snails do not belong to the game which your high mightinesses consider that you alone have a right to follow! Now, on the other hand, I know how to prepare from them an excellent high-flavoured drink; and I have taken enough for to-day: marvellous fat little beasts, with wise faces like a man's, and long twisted horns on their heads. Would you like to see them? Look here!"

And then he began to unfasten and fumble about his fur garment; but Sintram, filled with disgust and horror, said, "Psha! I detest such animals! Be quiet, and tell me at once who and what you yourself are."

"Are you so bent upon knowing my name?" replied the little man. "Let it content you that I am master of all secret knowledge, and well versed in the most intricate depths of ancient history. Ah! my young sir, if you would only hear them! But you are afraid of me."

"Afraid of you!" cried Sintram, with a wild laugh.

"Many a better man than you has been so before now," muttered the little Master; "but they did not like being told of it any more than you do."

"To prove that you are mistaken," said Sintram, "I will remain here with you till the moon stands high in the heavens. But you must tell me one of your stories the while."

The little man, much pleased, nodded his head; and as they paced together up and down a retired elm-walk, he began discoursing as follows:—

"Many hundred years ago a young knight, called Paris of Troy, lived in that sunny land of the south where are found the sweetest songs, the brightest flowers, and the most beautiful ladies. You know a song that tells of that fair land, do you not, young sir? 'Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers.'" Sintram bowed his head in assent, and sighed deeply. "Now," resumed the little Master, "it happened that Paris led that kind of life which is not uncommon in those countries, and of which their poets often sing—he would pass whole months together in the garb of a peasant, piping in the woods and mountains and pasturing his flocks. Here one day three beautiful sorceresses appeared to him, disputing about a golden apple; and from him they sought to know which of them was the most beautiful, since to her the golden fruit was to be awarded. The first knew how to give thrones, and sceptres, and crowns; the second could give wisdom and knowledge; and the third could prepare philtres and love-charms which could not fail of securing the affections of the fairest of women. Each one in turn proffered her choicest gifts to the young shepherd, in order that, tempted by them, he might adjudge the apple to her. But as fair women charmed him more than anything else in the world, he said that the third was the most beautiful—her name was Venus. The two others departed in great displeasure; but Venus bid him put on his knightly armour and his helmet adorned with waving feathers, and then she led him to a famous city called Sparta, where ruled the noble Duke

Menelaus. His young Duchess Helen was the loveliest woman on earth, and the sorceress offered her to Paris in return for the golden apple. He was most ready to have her, and wished for nothing better; but he asked how he was to gain possession of her."

"Paris must have been a sorry knight," interrupted Sintram. "Such things are easily settled. The husband is challenged to a single combat, and he that is victorious carries off the wife."

"But Duke Menelaus was the host of the young knight," said the narrator.

"Listen to me, little Master," cried Sintram; "he might have asked the sorceress for some other beautiful woman, and then have mounted his horse, or weighed anchor, and departed."

"Yes, yes; it is very easy to say so," replied the old man. "But if you only knew how bewitchingly lovely this Duchess Helen was, no room was left for change." And then he began a glowing description of the charms of this wondrously beautiful woman, but likening the image to Gabrielle so closely, feature for feature, that Sintram, tottering, was forced to lean against a tree. The little Master stood opposite to him grinning, and asked, "Well now, could you have advised that poor knight Paris to fly from her?"

"Tell me at once what happened next," stammered Sintram.

"The sorceress acted honourably towards Paris," continued the old man. "She declared to him that if he would carry away the lovely duchess to his own city Troy, he might do so, and thus cause the ruin of his whole house and of his country; but that during ten years he would be able to defend himself in Troy, and rejoice in the sweet love of Helen."

"And he accepted those terms, or he was a fool!" cried the youth.

"To be sure he accepted them," whispered the little Master. "I would have done so in his place! And do you know, young sir, the look of things then was just as they are happening to-day. The newly-risen moon, partly veiled by clouds, was shining dimly through the thick branches of the trees in the silence of evening. Leaning against an old tree, as you now are doing, stood the young enamoured knight Paris, and at his side the enchantress Venus, but so disguised and transformed, that she did not look much more beautiful than I do. And by the silvery light of the moon, the form of the beautiful beloved one was seen sweeping by alone amidst the whispering boughs." He was silent, and like as in the mirror of his deluding words, Gabrielle just then actually herself appeared, musing as she walked alone down the alley of elms.

"Man,—fearful Master,—by what name shall I call you? To what would you drive me?" muttered the trembling Sintram.

"Thou knowest thy father's strong stone castle on the Moon-rocks?" replied the old man. "The castellan and the garrison are true and devoted to thee. It could stand a ten years' siege; and the little gate which leads to the hills is open, as was that of the citadel of Sparta for Paris."

And, in fact, the youth saw through a gate, left open he knew not how, the dim, distant mountains glittering in the moonlight. "And if he did not accept, he was a fool," said the little Master, with a grin, echoing Sintram's former words.

At that moment Gabrielle stood close by him. She was within reach of his grasp, had he made the least movement; and a moonbeam, suddenly breaking forth, transfigured, as it were, her heavenly beauty. The youth had already bent forward—

"My Lord and God, I pray,
Turn from his heart away
This world's turmoil;
And call him to Thy light,
Be it through sorrow's night,
Through pain or toil."

These words were sung by old Rolf at that very time, as he lingered on the still margin of the castle fish-pond, where he prayed alone to Heaven, full of foreboding care. They reached Sintram's ear; he stood as if spell-bound, and made the Sign of the Cross. Immediately the little Master fled away, jumping uncouthly on one leg, through the gates, and shutting them after him with a yell.

Gabrielle shuddered, terrified at the wild noise. Sintram approached her softly, and said, offering his arm to her: "Suffer me to lead you back to the castle. The night in these northern regions is often wild and fearful."

CHAPTER VIII

THEY found the two knights drinking wine within. Folko was relating stories in his usual mild and cheerful manner, and Biorn was listening with a moody air, but yet as if, against his will, the dark cloud might pass away before that bright and gentle courtesy. Gabrielle saluted the baron with a smile, and signed to him to continue his discourse, as she took her place near the knight Biorn, full of watchful kindness. Sintram stood by the hearth, abstracted and melancholy; and the embers, as he stirred them, cast a strange glow over his pallid features.

"And of all the German trading-towns," continued Montfaucon, "the largest and richest is Hamburgh. In Normandy we willingly see their merchants land on our

coasts, and those excellent people never fail to prove themselves our friends when we seek their advice and assistance. When I first visited Hamburgh, every honour and respect was paid to me. I found its inhabitants engaged in a war with a neighbouring count, and immediately I used my sword for them, vigorously and successfully."

"Your sword! your knightly sword!" interrupted Biorn; and the old wonted fire flashed from his eyes. "Against a knight, and for shopkeepers!"

"Sir knight," replied Folko, calmly, "the barons of Montfaucon have ever used their swords as they chose, without the interference of another; and as I have received this good custom, so do I wish to hand it on. If you agree not to this, so speak it freely out. But I forbid every rude word against the men of Hamburgh, since I have declared them to be my friends."

Biorn cast down his haughty eyes, and their fire faded away. In a low voice he said, "Proceed, noble baron. You are right, and I am wrong."

Then Folko stretched out his hand to him across the table, and resumed his narration: "Amongst all my beloved Hamburghers the dearest to me are two men of marvellous experience—a father and son. What have they not seen and done in the remotest corners of the earth, and instituted in their native town! Praise be to God, my life cannot be called unfruitful; but, compared with the wise Gotthard Lenz and his stout-hearted son Rudlieb, I look upon myself as an esquire who has perhaps been some few times to tourneys, and, besides that, has never hunted out of his own forests. They have converted, subdued, gladdened, dark men whom I know not how to name; and the wealth which they have brought back with them has all been devoted to the common weal, as if fit for no other purpose. On their return from their long and perilous sea-voyages, they hasten to an hospital which has been founded

by them, and where they undertake the part of overseers, and of careful and patient nurses. Then they proceed to select the most fitting spots whereon to erect new towers and fortresses for the defence of their beloved country. Next they repair to the houses where strangers and travellers receive hospitality at their cost; and at last they return to their own abode, to entertain their guests, rich and noble like kings, and simple and unconstrained like shepherds. Many a tale of their wondrous adventures serves to enliven these sumptuous feasts. Amongst others, I remember to have heard my friends relate one at which my hair stood on end. Possibly I may gain some more complete information on the subject from you. It appears that several years ago, just about the time of the Christmas festival, Gotthard and Rudlieb were shipwrecked on the coast of Norway, during a violent winter tempest. They could never exactly ascertain the situation of the rocks on which their vessel stranded; but so much is certain, that very near the sea-shore stood a huge castle, to which the father and son betook themselves, seeking for that assistance and shelter which Christian people are ever willing to afford each other in case of need. They went alone, leaving their followers to watch the injured ship. The castle-gates were thrown open, and they thought all was well. But on a sudden the court-yard was filled with armed men, who with one accord aimed their sharp iron-pointed spears at the defenceless strangers, whose dignified remonstrances and mild entreaties were only heard in sullen silence or with scornful jeerings. After a while a knight came down the stairs, with fire-flashing eyes. They hardly knew whether to think they saw a spectre, or a wild heathen; he gave a signal, and the fatal spears closed around them. At that instant the soft tones of a woman's voice fell on their ear, calling on the Saviour's holy name for aid; at the sound, the spectres in the court-yard rushed

madly one against the other, the gates burst open, and Gotthard and Rudlieb fled away, catching a glimpse as they went of an angelic woman who appeared at one of the windows of the castle. They made every exertion to get their ship again afloat, choosing to trust themselves to the sea rather than to that barbarous coast; and at last, after manifold dangers, they landed at Denmark. They say that some heathen must have owned the cruel castle; but I hold it to be some ruined fortress, deserted by men, in which hellish spectres were wont to hold their nightly meetings. What heathen could be found so demon-like as to offer death to shipwrecked strangers, instead of refreshment and shelter?"

Biorn gazed fixedly on the ground, as though he were turned into stone; but Sintram came towards the table, and said, "Father, let us seek out this godless abode, and lay it level with the dust. I cannot tell how, but somehow I feel quite sure that the accursed deed of which we have just heard is alone the cause of my frightful dreams."

Enraged at his son, Biorn rose up, and would perhaps again have uttered some dreadful words; but Heaven decreed otherwise, for just at that moment the pealing notes of a trumpet were heard, which drowned the angry tones of his voice, the great doors opened slowly, and a herald entered the hall. He bowed reverently, and then said, "I am sent by Jarl Eric the Aged. He returned two days ago from his expedition to the Grecian seas. His wish had been to take vengeance on the island which is called Chios, where fifty years ago his father was slain by the soldiers of the Emperor. But your kinsman, the sea-king Arinbiorn, who was lying there at anchor, tried to pacify him. To this Jarl Eric would not listen; so the sea-king said next that he would never suffer Chios to be laid waste, because it was an island where the lays of an old Greek bard, called Homer, were excellently sung, and where more-

over a very choice wine was made. Words proving of no avail, a combat ensued ; in which Arinbiorn had so much the advantage that Jarl Eric lost two of his ships, and only with difficulty escaped in one which had already sustained great damage. Eric the Aged has now resolved to take revenge on some of the sea-king's race, since Arinbiorn himself is seldom on the spot. Will you, Biorn of the Fiery Eyes, at once pay as large a penalty in cattle, and money, and goods, as it may please the Jarl to demand? Or will you prepare to meet him with an armed force at Niflung's Heath seven days hence?"

Biorn bowed his head quietly, and replied in a mild tone, "Seven days hence at Niflung's Heath." He then offered to the herald a golden goblet full of rich wine, and added, "Drink that, and then carry off with thee the cup which thou hast emptied."

"The Baron of Montfaucon likewise sends greeting to thy chieftain, Jarl Eric," interposed Folko ; "and engages to be also at Niflung's Heath, as the hereditary friend of the sea-king, and also as the kinsman and guest of Biorn of the Fiery Eyes."

The herald was seen to tremble at the name of Montfaucon ; he bowed very low, cast an anxious, reverential look at the baron, and left the hall.

Gabrielle looked on her knight, smiling lovingly and securely, for she well knew his victorious prowess ; and she only asked, "Where shall I remain, whilst you go forth to battle, Folko?"

"I had hoped," answered Biorn, "that you would be well contented to stay in this castle, lovely lady ; I leave my son to guard you and attend on you."

Gabrielle hesitated an instant ; and Sintram, who had resumed his position near the fire, muttered to himself as he fixed his eyes on the bright flames which were flashing up, "Yes, yes, so it will probably happen. I can fancy

that Duke Menelaus had just left Sparta on some warlike expedition, when the young knight Paris met the lovely Helen that evening in the garden."

But Gabrielle, shuddering although she knew not why, said quickly, "Without you, Folko? And must I forego the joy of seeing you fight? or the honour of tending you, should you chance to receive a wound?"

Folko bowed, gracefully thanking his lady, and replied, "Come with your knight, since such is your pleasure, and be to him a bright guiding star. It is a good old northern custom that ladies should be present at knightly combats, and no true warrior of the north will fail to respect the place whence beams the light of their eyes. Unless, indeed," continued he with an inquiring look at Biorn, "unless Jarl Eric is not worthy of his forefather?"

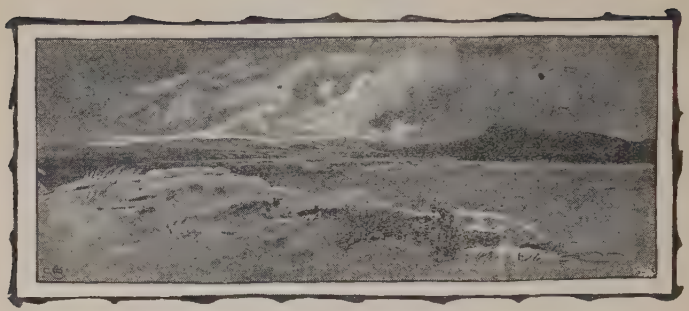
"A man of honour," said Biorn confidently.

"Then array yourself, my fairest love," said the delighted Folko; "array yourself and come forth with us to the battle-field to behold and judge our deeds."

"Come forth with us to the battle," echoed Sintram in a sudden transport of joy.

And they all dispersed in calm cheerfulness; Sintram betaking himself again to the wood, while the others retired to rest.

CHAPTER IX



IT was a wild dreary tract of country that, which bore the name of Niflung's Heath. According to tradition, the young Niflung, son of Hogni, the last of his race, had there ended darkly a sad and unsuccessful life. Many ancient grave-stones were still standing round about; and in the few oak-trees scattered here and there over the plain, huge eagles had built their nests. The beating of their heavy wings as they fought together, and their wild screams, were heard far off in more thickly-peopled regions; and at the sound children would tremble in their cradles, and old men quake with fear as they slumbered over the blazing hearth.

As the seventh night, the last before the day of combat, was just beginning, two large armies were seen descending from the hills in opposite directions; that which came from the west was commanded by Eric the Aged, that from the east by Biorn of the Fiery Eyes. They appeared thus early in compliance with the custom which required

that adversaries should always present themselves at the appointed field of battle before the time named, in order to prove that they rather sought than dreaded the fight. Folko forthwith pitched on the most convenient spot the tent of blue samite fringed with gold, which he carried with him to shelter his gentle lady; whilst Sintram, in the character of herald, rode over to Jarl Eric to announce to him that the beauteous Gabrielle of Montfaucon was present in the army of the knight Biorn, and would the next morning be present as a judge of the combat.

Jarl Eric bowed low on receiving this pleasing message; and ordered his bards to strike up a lay, the words of which ran as follows :—

"Warriors bold of Eric's band,
Gird your glittering armour on,
Stand beneath to-morrow's sun,
In your might.

Fairest dame that ever gladden'd
Our wild shores with beauty's vision,
May thy bright eyes o'er our combat,
Judge the right!

Tidings of yon noble stranger
Long ago have reach'd our ears,
Wafted upon southern breezes,
O'er the wave.

Now midst yonder hostile ranks,
In his warlike pride he meets us,
Folko comes! Fight, men of Eric,
True and brave!"

These wondrous tones floated over the plain, and reached the tent of Gabrielle. It was no new thing to her to hear her knight's fame celebrated on all sides; but now that she listened to his praises bursting forth in the stillness of night from the mouth of his enemies, she could scarce refrain from kneeling at the feet of the mighty chieftain. But he with

courteous tenderness held her up, and pressing his lips fervently on her soft hand, he said, " My deeds, O lovely lady, belong to thee, and not to me ! "

Now the night had passed away, and the east was glowing ; and on Niflung's Heath there was waving, and resounding, and glowing too. Knights put on their rattling armour, war-horses began to neigh, the morning draught went round in gold and silver goblets, while war-songs and the clang of harps resounded in the midst. A joyous march was heard in Biorn's camp, as Montfaucon, with his troops and retainers, clad in bright steel armour, conducted their lady up to a neighbouring hill, where she would be safe from the spears which would soon be flying in all directions, and whence she could look freely over the battle-field. The morning sun, as it were in homage, played over her beauty; and as she came in view of the camp of Jarl Eric, his soldiers lowered their weapons, whilst the chieftains bent low the crests of their huge helmets. Two of Montfaucon's pages remained in attendance on Gabrielle ; for so noble a service not unwillingly bridling their love of fighting. Both armies passed in front of her, saluting her and singing as they went ; they then placed themselves in array, and the fight began.

The spears flew from the hands of the stout northern warriors, rattling against the broad shields under which they sheltered themselves, or sometimes clattering as they met in the air ; at intervals, on one side or the other, a man was struck, and fell silent in his blood. Then the Knight of Montfaucon advanced with his troop of Norman horsemen—even as he dashed past, he did not fail to lower his shining sword to salute Gabrielle ; and then with an exulting war-cry, which burst from many a voice, they charged the left wing of the enemy. Eric's foot-soldiers, kneeling firmly, received them with fixed javelins—many a noble horse fell wounded to death, and in falling brought his

The Combat.—*p.* 52.

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rider with him to the ground; others again crushed their foes under them in their death-fall. Folko rushed through —he and his war-steed unwounded—followed by a troop of chosen knights. Already were they falling into disorder—already were Biorn's warriors giving shouts of victory—when a troop of horse, headed by Jarl Eric himself, advanced against the valiant baron; and whilst his Normans, hastily assembled, assisted him in repelling this new attack, the enemy's infantry were gradually forming themselves into a thick mass, which rolled on and on. All these movements seemed caused by a warrior whose loud piercing shout was heard in the midst. And scarcely were the troops formed into this strange array, when suddenly they spread themselves out on all sides, carrying everything before them with the irresistible force of the burning torrent from Hecla.

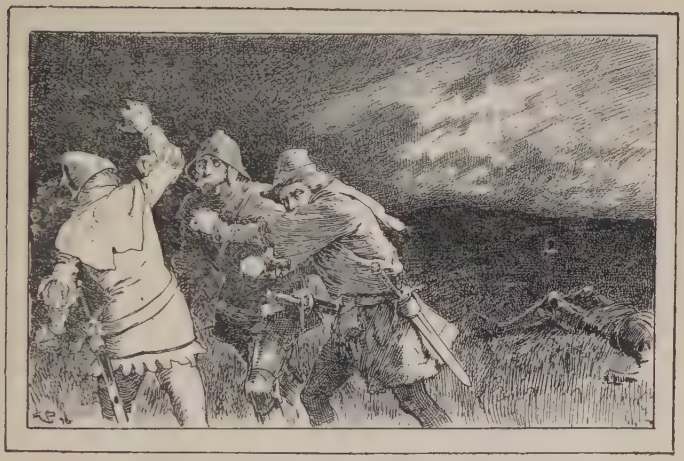
Biorn's soldiers, who had thought to enclose their enemies, lost courage and gave way before this wondrous onset. The knight himself in vain attempted to stem the tide of fugitives, and with difficulty escaped being carried away by it.

Sintram stood looking on this scene of confusion with mute indignation; friends and foes passed by him, all equally avoiding him, and dreading to come in contact with one whose aspect was so fearful, nay, almost unearthly, in his motionless rage. He aimed no blow either to right or left; his powerful battle-axe rested in his hand; but his eyes flashed fire, and seemed to be piercing the enemy's ranks through and through, as if he would find out who it was that had conjured up this sudden warlike spirit. He succeeded. A small man clothed in strange-looking armour, with large golden horns on his helmet, and a long visor advancing in front of it, was leaning on a two-edged curved spear, and seemed to be looking with derision at the flight of Biorn's troops as they were pursued by their victorious foes. "That is he," cried Sintram; "he who

will drive us from the field before the eyes of Gabrielle!" And with the swiftness of an arrow he flew towards him with a wild shout. The combat was fierce, but not of long duration. To the wondrous dexterity of his adversary, Sintram opposed his far superior size; and he dealt so fearful a blow on the horned helmet, that a stream of blood rushed forth, the small man fell as if stunned, and after some frightful convulsive movements, his limbs appeared to stiffen in death.

His fall gave the signal for that of all Eric's army. Even those who had not seen him fall, suddenly lost their courage and eagerness for the battle, and retreated with uncertain steps, or ran in wild affright on the spears of their enemies. At the same time Montfaucon was dispersing Jarl Eric's cavalry, after a desperate conflict—had hurled their chief from the saddle, and taken him prisoner with his own hand. Biorn of the Fiery Eyes stood victorious in the middle of the field of battle. The day was won.

X
CHAPTER



With fear they all fled.

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IN sight of both armies, with glowing cheeks and looks of modest humility, Sintram was conducted by the brave baron up the hill where Gabrielle stood in all the lustre of her beauty. Both warriors bent the knee before her, and Folko said, solemnly, "Lady, this valiant youth of a noble race has deserved the reward of this day's victory. I pray you let him receive it from your fair hand."

Gabrielle bowed courteously, took off her scarf of blue and gold, and fastened it to a bright sword, which a page brought to her on a cushion of cloth of silver. She then, with a smile, presented the noble gift to Sintram, who was bending forward to receive it, when suddenly Gabrielle drew back, and turning to Folko, said, "Noble baron,

should not he on whom I bestow a scarf and sword be first admitted into the order of knighthood?" Light as a feather, Folko sprang up, and bowing low before his lady, gave the youth the accolade with solemn earnestness. Then Gabrielle buckled on his sword, saying, "For the honour of God and the service of virtuous ladies, young knight. I saw you fight, I saw you conquer, and my earnest prayers followed you. Fight and conquer often again, as you have done this day, that the beams of your renown may shine over my far-distant country." And at a sign from Folko, she offered her tender lips for the new knight to kiss. Thrilling all over, and full of a holy joy, Sintram arose in deep silence, and hot tears streamed down his softened countenance, whilst the shout and the trumpets of the assembled troops greeted the youth with stunning applause. Old Rolf stood silently on one side, and as he looked in the mild beaming eyes of his foster-child, he calmly and piously returned thanks :

"The strife at length hath found its end,
Rich blessings now shall heaven send !
The evil foe is slain !"

Biorn and Jarl Eric had the while been talking together eagerly, but not unkindly. The conqueror now led his vanquished enemy up the hill and presented him to the baron and Gabrielle, saying, "Instead of two enemies you now see two sworn allies ; and I request you, my beloved guests and kinsfolk, to receive him graciously as one who henceforward belongs to us."

"He was so always," added Eric, smiling ; "I sought, indeed, revenge ; but I have now had enough of defeats both by sea and land. Yet I thank Heaven that neither in the Grecian seas, to the sea-king, nor in Niflung's Heath, to you, have I yielded ingloriously."

The Lord of Montfaucon assented cordially, and heartily

and solemnly was reconciliation made. Then Jarl Eric addressed Gabrielle with so noble a grace, that with a smile of wonder she gazed on the gigantic grey hero, and gave him her beautiful hand to kiss.

Meanwhile Sintram was speaking earnestly to his good Rolf; and at length he was heard to say, "But before all, be sure that you bury that wonderfully brave knight whom my battle-axe smote. Choose out the greenest hill for his resting-place, and the loftiest oak to shade his grave. Also, I wish you to open his visor, and to examine his countenance carefully, that so, though mortally smitten, we may not bury him alive; and moreover, that you may be able to describe to me him to whom I owe the noblest prize of victory."

Rolf bowed readily, and went.

"Our young knight is speaking there of one amongst the slain of whom I should like to hear more," said Folko, turning to Jarl Eric. "Who, dear Jarl, was that wonderful chieftain who led on your troops so skilfully, and who at last fell under Sintram's powerful battle-axe?"

"You ask me more than I know how to answer," replied Jarl Eric. "About three nights ago this stranger made his appearance amongst us. I was sitting with my chieftains and warriors round the hearth, forging our armour, and singing the while. Suddenly, above the din of our hammering and our singing, we heard so loud a noise that it silenced us in a moment, and we sat motionless as if we had been turned into stone. Before long the sound was repeated; and at last we made out that it must be caused by some person blowing a huge horn outside the castle, seeking for admittance. I went down myself to the gate, and as I passed through the court-yard all my dogs were so terrified by the extraordinary noise, as to be howling and crouching in their kennels instead of barking. I chid them, and called to them, but even the fiercest would not follow

me. Then, thought I, I must show you the way to set to work ; so I grasped my sword firmly, I set my torch on the ground close beside me, and I let the gates fly open without further delay. For I well knew that it would be no easy matter for any one to come in against my will. A loud laugh greeted me, and I heard these words, 'Well, well, what mighty preparations are these before one small man can find the shelter he seeks!' And in truth I did feel myself redden with shame when I saw the small stranger standing opposite to me quite alone. I called to him to come in at once, and offered my hand to him ; but he still showed some displeasure, and would not give me his in return. As he went up, however, he became more friendly—he showed me the golden horn on which he sounded that blast, and which he carried screwed on his helmet, as well as another exactly like it. When he was sitting with us in the hall, he behaved in a very strange manner—sometimes he was merry, sometimes cross ; by turns courteous and rude in his demeanour, without any one being able to see a motive for such constant changes. I longed to know where he came from ; but how could I ask my guest such a question? He told us as much as this, that he was starved with cold in our country, and that his own was much warmer. Also he appeared well acquainted with the city of Constantinople, and related fearful stories of how brothers, uncles, nephews, nay, even fathers and sons, thrust each other from the throne, blinded, cut out tongues, and murdered. At length he said his own name—it sounded harmonious, like a Greek name, but none of us could remember it. Before long he displayed his skill as an armourer. He understood marvellously well how to handle the red-hot iron, and how to form it into more murderous weapons than any I had ever before seen. I would not suffer him to go on making them, for I was resolved to meet you in the field with equal arms, and such

as we are all used to in our northern countries." Then he laughed, and said he thought it would be quite possible to be victorious without them, by skilful movements and the like; if only I would entrust the command of my infantry to him, I was sure of victory. Then I thought that he who makes arms well must also wield them well—yet I required some proof of his powers. Ye lords, he came off victorious in trials of strength such as you can hardly imagine; and although the fame of young Sintram, as a bold and brave warrior, is spread far and wide, yet I can scarce believe that he could slay such an one as my Greek ally."

He would have continued speaking, but the good Rolf came hastily back with a few followers, the whole party so ghastly pale, that all eyes were involuntarily fixed on them, and looked anxiously to hear what tidings they had brought. Rolf stood still, silent and trembling.

"Take courage, my old friend!" cried Sintram. "Whatever thou mayest have to tell is truth and light from thy faithful mouth."

"My dear master," began the old man, "be not angry, but as to burying that strange warrior whom you slew, it is a thing impossible. Would that we had never opened that wide hideous visor! For so horrible a countenance grinned at us from underneath it, so distorted by death, and with so hellish an expression, that we hardly kept our senses. We could not by any possibility have touched him. I would rather be sent to kill wolves and bears in the desert, and look on whilst fierce birds of prey feast on their carcasses."

All present shuddered, and were silent for a time, till Sintram nerved himself to say, "Dear, good old man, why use such wild words as I never till now heard thee utter? But tell me, Jarl Eric, did your ally appear altogether so awful while he was yet alive?"

"Not as far as I know," answered Jarl Eric, looking

inquiringly at his companions, who were standing around. They said the same thing; but on farther questioning, it appeared that neither the chieftain, nor the knights, nor the soldiers, could say exactly what the stranger was like.

"We must then find it out for ourselves, and bury the corpse," said Sintram; and he signed to the assembled party to follow him. All did so except the Lord of Montfaucon, whom the whispered entreaty of Gabrielle kept at her side. He lost nothing thereby. For though Niflung's Heath was searched from one end to the other many times, yet the body of the unknown warrior was no longer to be found.

XI

CHAPTER

THE joyful calm which came over Sintram on this day appeared to be more than a passing gleam. If too, at times, a thought of the knight Paris and Helen would inflame his heart with bolder and wilder wishes, it needed but one look at his scarf and sword, and the stream of his inner life glided again clear as a mirror, and serene within. "What can any man wish for more than has been already bestowed on me?" would he say to himself at such times in still delight. And thus it went on for a long while.

The beautiful northern autumn had already begun to redden the leaves of the oaks and elms round the castle, when one day it chanced that Sintram was sitting in company with Folko and Gabrielle in almost the very same

spot in the garden where he had before met that mysterious being whom, without knowing why, he had named the little Master. But on this day how different did everything appear! The sun was sinking slowly over the sea, the mist of an autumnal evening was rising from the fields and meadows around, towards the hill on which stood the huge castle. Gabrielle, placing her lute in Sintram's hands, said to him, "Dear friend, so mild and gentle as you now are, I may well dare to entrust to you my tender little darling. Let me again hear you sing that lay of the land of flowers; for I am sure that it will now sound much sweeter than when you accompanied it with the vibrations of your fearful harp."

The young knight bowed as he prepared to obey the lady's commands. With a grace and softness hitherto unwonted, the tones resounded from his lips, and the wild song appeared to transform itself, and to bloom into a garden of the blessed. Tears stood in Gabrielle's eyes; and Sintram, as he gazed on the pearly brightness, poured forth tones of yet richer sweetness. When the last notes were sounded, Gabrielle's angelic voice was heard to echo them; and as she repeated

"Sing heigh, sing ho, for that land of flowers,"

Sintram put down the lute, and sighed with a thankful glance towards the stars, now rising in the heavens. Then Gabrielle, turning towards her lord, murmured these words: "Oh, how long have we been far away from our own shining castles and bright gardens! Oh, for that land of the sweetest flowers!"

Sintram could scarce believe that he heard aright, so suddenly did he feel himself as if shut out from paradise. But his last hope vanished before the courteous assurances of Folko that he would endeavour to fulfil his lady's wishes the very next week, and that their ship was lying off the

shore ready to put to sea. She thanked him with a kiss imprinted softly on his forehead; and leaning on his arm, she bent her steps, singing and smiling, towards the castle.

Sintram, troubled in mind, as though turned into stone, remained behind forgotten. At length, when night was now in the sky, he started up wildly, ran up and down the garden, as if all his former madness had again taken possession of him; and then rushed out and wandered upon the wild moonlit hills. There he dashed his sword against the trees and bushes, so that on all sides was heard a sound of crashing and falling. The birds of night flew about him screeching in wild alarm; and the deer, startled by the noise, sprang away and took refuge in the thickest coverts.

On a sudden old Rolf appeared, returning home from a visit to the chaplain of Drontheim, to whom he had been relating, with tears of joy, how Sintram was softened by the presence of the angel Gabrielle, yea, almost healed, and how he dared to hope that the evil dreams had yielded. And now the sword, as it whizzed round the furious youth, had well-nigh wounded the good old man. He stopped short, and clasping his hand, he said, with a deep sigh, "Alas, Sintram! my foster-child, darling of my heart, what has come over thee, thus fearfully stirring thee to rage?"

The youth stood awhile as if spell-bound; he looked in his old friend's face with a fixed and melancholy gaze, and his eyes became dim, like expiring watch-fires seen through a thick cloud of mist. At length he sighed forth these words, almost inaudibly: "Good Rolf, good Rolf, depart from me! thy garden of heaven is no home for me; and if sometimes a light breeze blow open its golden gates, so that I can look in and see the flowery meadow-land where the dear angels dwell, then straightway between them and

me come the cold north wind and the icy storm, and the sounding doors fly together, and I remain without, lonely, in endless winter."

"Beloved young knight, oh, listen to me—listen to the good angel within you! Do you not bear in your hand that very sword with which the pure lady girded you? does not her scarf wave over your raging breast? Do you not recollect how you used to say, that no man could wish for more than had fallen to you?"

"Yes, Rolf, I have said that," replied Sintram, sinking on the mossy turf, bitterly weeping. Tears also ran over the old man's white beard. Before long the youth stood again erect, his tears ceased to flow, his looks were fearful, cold, and grim; and he said, "You see, Rolf, I have passed blessed peaceful days, and I thought that the powers of evil would never again have dominion over me. So, perchance, it might have been, as day would ever be did the Sun ever stand in the sky. But ask the poor benighted Earth, wherefore she looks so dark! Bid her again smile as she was wont to do! Old man, she cannot smile; and now that the gentle compassionate Moon has disappeared behind the clouds with her only funeral veil, she cannot even weep. And in this hour of darkness all that is wild and mad wakes up. So, stop me not, I tell thee, stop me not! Hurra, behind, behind the pale Moon!" His voice changed to a hoarse murmur at these last words, storm-like. He tore away from the trembling old man, and rushed through the forest. Rolf knelt down and prayed, and wept silently.

CHAPTER XII

WHERE the sea-beach was wildest, and the cliffs most steep and rugged, and close by the remains of three shattered oaks, haply marking where, in heathen times, human victims had been sacrificed, now stood Sintram, leaning, as if exhausted, on his drawn sword, and gazing intently on the dancing waves. The moon had again shone forth; and as her pale beams fell on his motionless figure through the quivering branches of the trees, he might have been taken for some fearful idol-image. Suddenly some one on the left half raised himself out of the high withered grass, uttered a faint groan, and again lay down. Then between the two companions began this strange talk:

"Thou that movest thyself so strangely in the grass, dost thou belong to the living or to the dead?"

"As one may take it. I am dead to heaven and joy—I live for hell and anguish."

"Methinks that I have heard thee before."

"Oh, yes."

"Art thou a troubled spirit? and was thy life-blood poured out here of old in sacrifice to idols?"

"I am a troubled spirit; but no man ever has, or ever can, shed my blood. I have been cast down—oh, into a frightful abyss!"

"And didst thou break there thy neck?"

"I live,—and shall live longer than thou."

"Almost thou seemest to me the crazy pilgrim with the dead men's bones."

"I am not he, though often we are companions,—ay, walk together right near and friendly. But to you be it said, he thinks me mad. If sometimes I urge him, and say to him, 'Take!' then he hesitates and points upwards towards the stars. And again, if I say, 'Take not!' then, to a certainty, he seizes on it in some awkward manner, and so he spoils my best joys and pleasures. But, in spite of this, we remain in some measure brothers in arms, and, indeed, all but kinsmen."

"Give me hold of thy hand, and let me help thee to get up."

"Ho, ho! my active young sir, that might bring you no good. Yet, in fact, you have already helped to raise me. Give heed awhile."

Wilder and ever wilder were the strugglings on the ground; thick clouds hurried over the moon and the stars, on a long unknown wild journey; and Sintram's thoughts grew no less wild and stormy, while far and near an awful howling could be heard amidst the trees and the grass. At length the mysterious being arose from the ground. As if with a fearful curiosity, the moon, through a rent in the clouds, cast a beam upon Sintram's companion, and made

Sintram looked out upon the distant heaving of the waves. —*p.* 67

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clear to the shuddering youth that the little Master stood by him.

"Avaunt!" cried he, "I will listen no more to thy evil stories about the knight Paris: they would end by driving me quite mad."

"My stories about Paris are not needed for that!" grinned the little Master. "It is enough that the Helen of thy heart should be journeying towards Montfaucon. Believe me, madness has thee already, head and heart. Or wouldest thou that she should remain? For that, however, thou must be more courteous to me than thou art now."

Therewith he raised his voice towards the sea, as if fiercely rebuking it, so that Sintram could not but shudder and tremble before the dwarf. But he checked himself, and grasping his sword-hilt with both hands, he said, contemptuously: "Thou and Gabrielle! what acquaintance hast thou with Gabrielle?"

"Not much," was the reply. And the little Master might be seen to quake with fear and rage as he continued: "I cannot well bear the name of thy Helen; do not din it in my ears ten times in a breath. But if the tempest should increase? If the waves should swell, and roll on till they form a foaming ring round the whole coast of Norway? The voyage to Montfaucon must in that case be altogether given up, and thy Helen would remain here, at least through the long, long, dark winter."

"If! if!" replied Sintram, with scorn. "Is the sea thy bond-slave? Are the storms thy fellow-workmen?"

"They are rebels, accursed rebels," muttered the little Master in his red beard. "Thou must lend me thy aid, sir knight, if I am to subdue them; but thou hast not the heart for it."

"Boaster, evil boaster!" answered the youth; "what dost thou ask of me?"

"Not much, sir knight; nothing at all for one who has strength and ardour of soul. Thou needest only look at the sea steadily and keenly for one half-hour, without ever ceasing to wish with all thy might that it should foam and rage and swell, and never again rest till winter has laid its icy hold upon your mountains. Then winter is enough to hinder Duke Menelaus from his voyage to Montfaucon. And now give me a lock of your black hair, which is blowing so wildly about your head, like ravens' or vultures' wings."

The youth drew his sharp dagger, madly cut off a lock of his hair, threw it to the strange being, and now gazed, as he desired, powerfully wishing, on the waves of the sea. And softly, quite softly, did the waters stir themselves, as one whispers in troubled dreams who would gladly rest and cannot. Sintram was on the point of giving up, when in the moonbeams a ship appeared, with white-swelling sails, towards the south. Anguish came over him, that Gabrielle would soon thus quickly sail away; he wished again with all his power, and fixed his eyes intently on the watery abyss. "Sintram," a voice might have said to him—"ah, Sintram, art thou indeed the same who so lately wert gazing on the moistened heaven of the eyes of Gabrielle?"

And now the waters heaved more mightily, and the howling tempest swept over the ocean; the breakers, white with foam, became visible in the moonlight. Then the little Master threw the lock of Sintram's hair up towards the clouds, and, as it was blown to and fro by the blast of wind, the storm burst in all its fury, so that sea and sky were covered with one thick cloud, and far off might be heard the cries of distress from many a sinking vessel.

But the crazy pilgrim with the dead men's bones rose up in the midst of the waves, close to the shore, gigantic, tall, fearfully rocking; the boat in which he stood was

hidden from sight, so mightily raged the waves round about it.

"Thou must save him, little Master—thou must certainly save him," cried Sintram's voice, angrily entreating, through the roaring of the winds and waves. But the dwarf replied, with a laugh: "Be quite at rest for him; he will be able to save himself. The waves can do him no harm. Seest thou? They are only begging of him, and therefore they jump up so boldly round him; and he gives them bountiful alms—very bountiful, that I can assure thee."

In fact, as it seemed, the pilgrim threw some bones into the sea, and passed scatheless on his way. Sintram felt his blood run cold with horror, and he rushed wildly towards the castle. His companion had either fled or vanished away.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the castle, Biorn and Gabrielle and Folko of Montfaucon were sitting round the great stone table, from which, since the arrival of his noble guests, those suits of armour had been removed, formerly the established companions of the lord of the castle, and placed all together in a heap in the adjoining room. At this time, while the storm was beating so furiously against doors and windows, it seemed as if the ancient armour were also stirring in the next room, and Gabrielle several times half rose from her seat in great alarm, fixing her eyes on the small iron door, as though she expected to see an armed spectre issue therefrom, bending with his mighty helmet through the low vaulted doorway.

The knight Biorn smiled grimly, and said, as if he had guessed her thoughts: "Oh, he will never again come out thence; I have put an end to that for ever."

His guests stared at him doubtingly; and with a strange air of unconcern, as though the storm had awakened all the fierceness of his soul, he began the following history:

"I was once a happy man myself; I could smile, as you do, and I could rejoice in the morning as you do; that was before the hypocritical chaplain had so bewildered the wise mind of my lovely wife with his canting talk, that she went into a cloister, and left me alone with our wild boy. That was not fair usage from the fair Verena. Well, so it was, that in the first days of her dawning beauty, before I knew her, many knights sought her hand, amongst whom was Sir Weigand the Slender; and towards him the gentle maiden showed herself the most favourably inclined. Her parents were well aware that Weigand's rank and station were little below their own, and that his early fame as a warrior without reproach stood high; so that before long Verena and he were accounted as affianced. It happened one day that they were walking together in the orchard, when a shepherd was driving his flock up the mountain beyond. The maiden saw a little snow-white lamb frolicking gaily, and longed for it. Weigand vaults over the railings, overtakes the shepherd, and offers him two gold bracelets for the lamb. But the shepherd will not part with it, and scarcely listens to the knight, going quietly the while up the mountain-side, with Weigand close upon him. At last Weigand loses patience. He threatens; and the shepherd, sturdy and proud like all of his race in our northern land, threatens in return. Suddenly Weigand's sword resounds upon his head,—the stroke should have fallen flat, but who can control a fiery horse or a drawn sword? The bleeding shepherd, with a cloven skull, falls down the precipice; his frightened flock bleats on the mountain. Only the little lamb runs in its terror to the orchard, pushes itself through the garden-rails, and lies at Verena's feet, as if asking for help, all red with its master's

blood. She took it up in her arms, and from that moment never suffered Weigand the Slender to appear again before her face. She continued to cherish the little lamb, and seemed to take pleasure in nothing else in the world, and became pale and turned towards heaven, as the lilies are. She would soon have taken the veil, but just then I came to aid her father in a bloody war, and rescued him from his enemies. The old man represented this to her, and, softly smiling, she gave me her lovely hand. His grief would not suffer the unhappy Weigand to remain in his own country. It drove him forth as a pilgrim to Asia, whence our forefathers came, and there he did wonderful deeds, both of valour and self-abasement. Truly, my heart was strangely weak when I heard him spoken of at that time. After some years he returned, and wished to build a church or monastery on that mountain towards the west, whence the walls of my castle are distinctly seen. It was said that he wished to become a priest there, but it fell out otherwise. For some pirates had sailed from the southern seas, and, hearing of the building of this monastery, their chief thought to find much gold belonging to the lord of the castle and to the master builders, or else, if he surprised and carried them off, to extort from them a mighty ransom. He did not yet know northern courage and northern weapons ; but he soon gained that knowledge. Having landed in the creek under the black rocks, he made his way through a by-path up to the building, surrounded it, and thought in himself that the affair was now ended. Ha ! then out rushed Weigand and his builders, and fell upon them with swords and hatchets and hammers. The heathens fled away to their ships, with Weigand behind to take vengeance on them. In passing by our castle he caught a sight of Verena on the terrace, and, for the first time during so many years, she bestowed a courteous and kind salutation on the glowing victor. At that moment a dagger, hurled

by one of the pirates in the midst of his hasty flight, struck Weigand's uncovered head, and he fell to the ground bleeding and insensible. We completed the rout of the heathens: then I had the wounded knight brought into the castle; and my pale Verena glowed as lilies in the light of the morning sun, and Weigand opened his eyes with a smile when he was brought near her. He refused to be taken into any room but the small one close to this where the armour is now placed; for he said that he felt as if it were a cell like that which he hoped soon to inhabit in his quiet cloister. All was done after his wish: my sweet Verena nursed him, and he appeared at first to be on the straightest road to recovery; but his head continued weak and liable to be confused by the slightest emotion, his walk was rather a falling than a walking, and his cheeks were colourless. We could not let him go. When we were sitting here together in the evening, he used always to come tottering into the hall through the low doorway; and my heart was sad and wrathful too, when the soft eyes of Verena beamed so sweetly on him, and a glow like that of the evening sky hovered over her lily cheeks. But I bore it, and I could have borne it to the end of our lives,—when, alas! Verena went into a cloister!"

His head fell so heavily on his folded hands, that the stone table seemed to groan beneath it, and he remained a long while motionless as a corpse. When he again raised himself up, his eyes glared fearfully as he looked round the hall, and he said to Folko: "Your beloved Hamburghers, Gotthard Lenz, and Rudlieb his son, they have much to answer for! Who bid them come and be shipwrecked so close to my castle?"

Folko cast a piercing look on him, and a fearful inquiry was on the point of escaping his lips, but another look at the trembling Gabrielle made him silent, at least for the present moment, and the knight Biorn continued his narrative.

"Verena was with her nuns, I was left alone, and my despair had driven me throughout the day through forest and brook and mountain. In the twilight I returned to my deserted castle, and scarcely was I in the hall, when the little door creaked, and Weigand, who had slept through all, crept towards me and asked: 'Where can Verena be?' Then I became as mad, and howled to him, 'She is gone mad, and so am I, and you also, and now we are all mad!' Merciful Heaven, the wound on his head burst open, and a dark stream flowed over his face—ah! how different from the redness when Verena met him at the castle-gate; and he rushed forth, raving mad, into the wilderness without, and ever since has wandered all around as a crazy pilgrim."

He was silent, and so were Folko and Gabrielle, all three pale and cold like images of the dead. At length the fearful narrator added in a low voice, and as if he were quite exhausted: "He has visited me since that time, but he will never again come through the little door. Have I not established peace and order in my castle?"

CHAPTER XIV

"I dare not fight with thee."

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SINTRAM had not returned home, when those of the castle betook themselves to rest in deep bewilderment. No one thought of him, for every heart was filled with strange forebodings, and with uncertain cares. Even the heroic breast of the Knight of Montfaucon heaved in doubt.

Old Rolf still remained without, weeping in the forest, heedless of the storm which beat on his unprotected head, while he waited for his young master. But he had gone a very different way; and when the morning dawned, he entered the castle from the opposite side.

Gabrielle's slumbers had been sweet during the whole night. It had seemed to her that angels with golden wings

had blown away the wild histories of the evening before, and had wafted to her the bright flowers, the sparkling sea, and the green hills of her own home. She smiled, and drew her breath calmly and softly, whilst the magical tempest raged and howled through the forests, and continued to battle with the troubled sea. But in truth when she awoke in the morning, and heard still the rattling of the windows, and saw the clouds, as if dissolved in mist and steam, still hiding the face of the heavens, she could have wept for anxiety and sadness, especially when she heard from her maidens that Folko had already left their apartment clad in full armour as if prepared for a combat. At the same time she heard the sound of the heavy tread of armed men in the echoing halls, and, on inquiring, found that the Knight of Montfaucon had assembled all his retainers to be in readiness to protect their lady.

Wrapped in a cloak of ermine, she stood trembling like a tender flower just sprung up out of the snow, tottering beneath a winter's storm. Then Sir Folko entered the room, in all his shining armour, and peacefully carrying his golden helmet with the long shadowy plumes in his hand. He saluted Gabrielle with cheerful serenity, and at a sign from him, her attendants retired, while the men-at-arms without were heard quietly dispersing.

"Lady," said he, as he took his seat beside her, on a couch to which he led her, already re-assured by his presence: "lady, will you forgive your knight for having left you to endure some moments of anxiety; but honour and stern justice called him. Now all is set in order, quietly and peacefully; dismiss your fears and every thought that has troubled you, as things which are no more."

"But you and Biorn?" asked Gabrielle.

"On the word of a knight," replied he, "all is well there." And thereupon he began to talk over indifferent subjects

with his usual ease and wit ; but Gabrielle, bending towards him, said with deep emotion :

" O Folko, my knight, the flower of my life, my protector and my dearest hope on earth, tell me all, if thou mayst. But if a promise binds thee, it is different. Thou knowest that I am of the race of Portamour, and I would ask nothing from my knight which could cast even a breath of suspicion on his spotless shield."

Folko thought gravely for one instant ; then looking at her with a bright smile, he said : " It is not that, Gabrielle ; but canst thou bear what I have to disclose ? Wilt thou not sink down under it, as a slender fir gives way under a mass of snow ? "

She raised herself somewhat proudly, and said : " I have already reminded thee of the name of my father's house. Let me now add, that I am the wedded wife of the Baron of Montfaucon."

" Then so let it be," replied Folko solemnly ; " and if that must come forth openly which should ever have remained hidden in the darkness which belongs to such deeds of wickedness, at least let it come forth less fearfully with a sudden flash. Know then, Gabrielle, that the wicked knight who would have slain my friends Gotthard and Rudlieb is none other than our kinsman and host, Biorn of the Fiery Eyes."

Gabrielle shuddered and covered her eyes with her fair hands ; but at the end of a moment she looked up with a bewildered air, and said : " I have heard wrong surely, although it is true that yesterday evening such a thought struck me. For did not you say awhile ago that all was settled and at peace between you and Biorn ? Between the brave baron and such a man after such a crime ? "

" You heard aright," answered Folko, looking with fond delight on the delicate yet high-minded lady. " This morning with the earliest dawn I went to him and challenged

him to a mortal combat in the neighbouring valley, if he were the man whose castle had well-nigh become an altar of sacrifice to Gotthard and Rudlieb. He was already completely armed, and merely saying, 'I am he,' he followed me to the forest. But when he stood alone at the place of combat, he flung away his shield down a giddy precipice, then his sword was hurled after it, and next with gigantic strength he tore off his coat of mail, and said, 'Now fall on, thou minister of vengeance ; for I am a heavy sinner, and I dare not fight with thee.' How could I then attack him ? A strange truce was agreed on between us. He is half as my vassal, and yet I solemnly forgave him in my own name and in that of my friends. He was contrite, and yet no tear was in his eye, no gentle word on his lips. He is only kept under by the power with which I am endued by having right on my side, and it is on that tenure that Biorn is my vassal. I know not, lady, whether you can bear to see us together on these terms ; if not, I will ask for hospitality in some other castle ; there are none in Norway which would not receive us joyfully and honourably, and this wild autumnal storm may put off our voyage for many a day. Only this I think, that if we depart directly and in such a manner, the heart of this savage man will break."

"Where my noble lord remains, there I also remain joyfully under his protection," replied Gabrielle ; and again her heart glowed with rapture at the greatness of her knight.

XV
CHAPTER

THE noble lady had just unbuckled her knight's armour with her own fair hands,—on the field of battle alone were pages or esquires bidden handle Montfaucon's armour, —and now she was throwing over his shoulders his mantle of blue velvet embroidered with gold, when the door opened gently, and Sintram entered the room, humbly greeting them. Gabrielle received him kindly, as she was wont, but suddenly turning pale, she looked away and said :

" O Sintram, what has happened to you ? And how can one single night have so fearfully altered you ? "

Sintram stood still, thunderstruck, and feeling as if he himself did not know what had befallen him. Then Folko took him by the hand, led him towards a bright polished shield, and said very earnestly, " Look here at yourself, young knight ! "

At the first glance Sintram drew back horrified. He fancied that he saw the little Master before him with that single upright feather sticking out of his cap; but he at length perceived that the mirror was only showing him his own image and none other, and that his own wild dagger had given him this strange and spectre-like aspect, as he could not deny to himself.

"Who has done that to you?" asked Folko, yet more grave and solemn. "And what terror makes your disordered hair stand on end?"

Sintram knew not what to answer. He felt as if a judgment were coming on him, and a shameful degrading from his knightly rank. Suddenly Folko drew him away from the shield, and taking him towards the rattling window, he asked: "Whence comes this tempest?"

Still Sintram kept silence. His limbs began to tremble under him; and Gabrielle, pale and terrified, whispered, "O Folko, my knight, what has happened? Oh, tell me; are we come into an enchanted castle?"

"The land of our northern ancestors," replied Folko with solemnity, "is full of mysterious knowledge. But we may not, for all that, call its people enchanters; still this youth has cause to watch himself narrowly; he whom the evil one has touched by so much as one hair of his head . . ."

Sintram heard no more; with a deep groan he staggered out of the room. As he left it, he met old Rolf, still almost benumbed by the cold and storms of the night. Now, in his joy at again seeing his young master, he did not remark his altered appearance; but as he accompanied him to his sleeping-room he said, "Witches and spirits of the tempest must have taken up their abode on the sea-shore. I am certain that such wild storms never arise without some devilish arts."

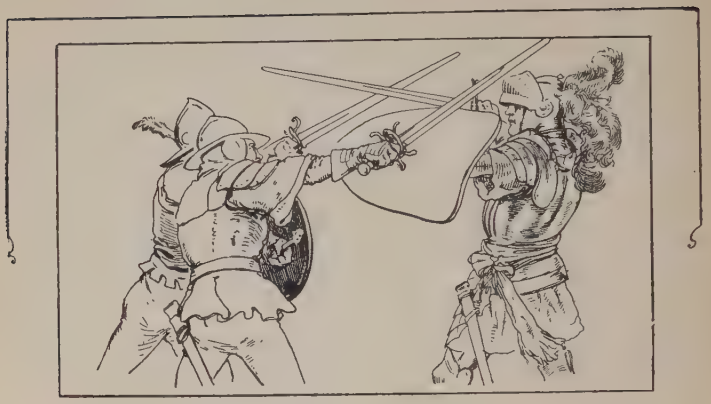
Sintram fell into a fainting-fit, from which Rolf could with difficulty recover him sufficiently to appear in the great hall

at the mid-day hour. But before he went down, he caused a shield to be brought, saw himself therein, and cut close round, in grief and horror, the rest of his long black hair, so that he made himself look almost like a monk ; and thus he joined the others already assembled round the table. They all looked at him with surprise ; but old Biorn rose up and said fiercely, "Are you going to betake yourself to the cloister, as well as the fair lady your mother ?"

A commanding look from the Baron of Montfaucon checked any further outbreak ; and as if in apology, Biorn added, with a forced smile, "I was only thinking if any accident had befallen him, like Absalom's, and if he had been obliged to save himself from being strangled by parting with all his hair."

"You should not jest with holy things," answered the baron severely, and all were silent. No sooner was the repast ended, than Folko and Gabrielle, with a grave and courteous salutation, retired to their apartments.

CHAPTER XVI



LIFE in the castle took from this time quite another form. Those two bright beings, Folko and Gabrielle, spent most part of the day in their apartments, and when they showed themselves, it was with quiet dignity and grave silence, while Biorn and Sintram stood before them in humble fear. Nevertheless, Biorn could not bear the thought of his guests seeking shelter in any other knight's abode. When Folko once spoke of it, something like a tear stood in the wild man's eye. His head sank, and he said softly, "As you please; but I feel that if you go, I shall run among the rocks for days."

And thus they all remained together; for the storm continued to rage with such increasing fury over the sea, that no sea voyage could be thought of, and the oldest man in Norway could not call to mind such an autumn. The priests exmained all the runic books, the bards looked

through their lays and tales, and yet they could find no record of the like. Biorn and Sintram braved the tempest; but during the few hours in which Folko and Gabrielle showed themselves, the father and son were always in the castle, as if respectfully waiting upon them; the rest of the day—nay, often through whole nights, they rushed through the forests and over the rocks in pursuit of bears. Folko the while called up all the brightness of his fancy, all his courtly grace, in order to make Gabrielle forget that she was living in this wild castle, and that the long, hard northern winter was setting in, which would ice them in for many a month. Sometimes he would relate bright tales; then he would play the liveliest airs to induce Gabrielle to lead a dance with her attendants; then, again, handing his lute to one of the women, he would himself take a part in the dance, well knowing to express thereby after some new fashion his devotion to his lady. Another time he would have the spacious halls of the castle prepared for his armed retainers to go through their warlike exercises, and Gabrielle always adjudged the reward to the conqueror. Folko often joined the circle of combatants; yet so that he only met their attacks, defending himself, but depriving no one of the prize. The Norwegians, who stood around as spectators, used to compare him to the demi-god Baldur, one of the heroes of their old traditions, who was wont to let the darts of his companions be all hurled against him, conscious that he was invulnerable, and of his own indwelling strength.

At the close of one of these martial exercises, old Rolf advanced towards Folko, and beckoning him with an humble look, said softly, "They call you the beautiful mighty Baldur,—and they are right. But even the beautiful mighty Baldur did not escape death. Take heed to yourself." Folko looked at him wondering. "Not that I know of any treachery," continued the old man; "or that

I can even foresee the likelihood of any. God keep a Norwegian from such a fear. But when you stand before me in all the brightness of your glory, the fleetingness of everything earthly weighs down my mind, and I cannot refrain from saying, 'Take heed, noble baron! oh, take heed! Even the most beautiful glory comes to an end.'"

"Those are wise and pious thoughts," replied Folko calmly, "and I will treasure them in a pure heart."

The good Rolf was often with Folko and Gabrielle, and made a connecting link between the two widely differing parties in the castle. For how could he have ever forsaken his own Sintram! Only in the wild hunting expeditions through the howling storms and tempests he no longer was able to follow his young lord.

At length the icy reign of winter began in all its glory. On this account a return to Normandy was impossible, and therefore the magical storm was lulled. The hills and valleys shone brilliantly in their white attire of snow, and Folko used sometimes, with skates on his feet, to draw his lady in a light sledge over the glittering frozen lakes and streams. On the other hand, the bear-hunts of the lord of the castle and his son took a still more desperate and to them joyous course.

About this time,—when Christmas was drawing near, and Sintram was seeking to overpower his dread of the awful dreams by the most daring expeditions,—about this time, Folko and Gabrielle stood together on one of the terraces of the castle. The evening was mild; the snow-clad fields were glowing in the red light of the setting sun; from below there were heard men's voices singing songs of ancient heroic times, while they worked in the armourer's forge. At last the songs died away, the beating of hammers ceased, and, without the speakers being seen, or there being any possibility of distinguishing them by their voices, the following discourse arose:—

"Who is the bravest amongst all those whose race derives its origin from our renowned land?"

"It is Folko of Montfaucon."

"Rightly said; but tell me, is there anything from which even this bold baron draws back?"

"In truth there is one thing,—and we who have never left Norway face it quite willingly and joyfully."

"And that is——?"

"A bear-hunt in winter, over trackless plains of snow, down frightful ice-covered precipices."

"Truly thou answerest aright, my comrade. He who knows not how to fasten our skates on his feet, how to turn in them to the right or left at a moment's warning, he may be a valiant knight in other respects, but he had better keep away from our hunting parties, and remain with his timid wife in her apartments." At which the speakers were heard to laugh well pleased, and then to betake themselves again to their armourer's work.

Folko stood long buried in thought. A glow beyond that of the evening sky reddened his cheek. Gabrielle also remained silent, considering she knew not what. At last she took courage, and embracing her beloved, she said: "To-morrow thou wilt go forth to hunt the bear, wilt thou not? and thou wilt bring the spoils of the chase to thy lady?"

The knight gave a joyful sign of assent; and the rest of the evening was spent in dances and music.

CHAPTER XVII

'SEE, my noble lord," said Sintram the next morning, when Folko had expressed his wish of going out with him, "these skates of ours give such wings to our course, that we go down the mountain-side swiftly as the wind; and even in going up again we are too quick for any one to be able to pursue us, and on the plains no horse can keep up with us; and yet they can only be worn with safety by those who are well practised. It seems as though some strange spirit dwelt in them, which is fearfully dangerous to any that have not learnt the management of them in their childhood.

Folko answered somewhat proudly: "Do you suppose that this is the first time that I have been amongst your mountains? Years ago I have joined in this sport, and,

thank Heaven, there is no knightly exercise which does not speedily become familiar to me."

Sintram did not venture to make any further objections, and still less did old Biorn. They both felt relieved when they saw with what skill and ease Folko buckled the skates on his feet, without suffering any one to assist him. This day they hunted up the mountain in pursuit of a fierce bear which had often before escaped from them. Before long it was necessary that they should separate, and Sintram offered himself as companion to Folko, who, touched by the humble manner of the youth, and his devotion to him, forgot all that had latterly seemed mysterious in the pale altered being before him, and agreed heartily. As now they continued to climb higher and higher up the mountain, and saw from many a giddy height the rocks and crags below them looking like a vast expanse of sea suddenly turned into ice whilst tossed by a violent tempest, the noble Montfaucon drew his breath more freely. He poured forth war-songs and love-longs in the clear mountain air, and the startled echoes repeated from rock to rock the lays of his Frankish home. He sprang lightly from one precipice to another, using strongly and safely his staff for support, and turning now to the right, now to the left, as the fancy seized him ; so that Sintram was fain to exchange his former anxiety for a wondering admiration, and the hunters, whose eyes had never been taken off the baron, burst forth with loud applause, proclaiming far and wide the fresh glory of their guest.

The good fortune which usually accompanied Folko's deeds of arms seemed still unwilling to leave him. After a short search, he and Sintram found distinct traces of the savage animal, and with beating hearts they followed the track so swiftly that even a winged enemy would have been unable to escape from them. But the creature whom they sought did not attempt a flight—he lay sulkily in a

cavern near the top of a steep precipitous rock, infuriated by the shouts of the hunters, and only waiting in his lazy fury for some one to be bold enough to climb up to his retreat, that he might tear him to pieces. Folko and Sintram had now reached the foot of this rock, the rest of the hunters being dispersed over the far-extending plain. The track led the two companions up the rock, and they set about climbing on the opposite sides of it, that they might be the more sure of not missing their prey. Folko reached the lonely topmost point first, and cast his eyes around. A wide, boundless tract of country, covered with untrodden snow, was spread before him, melting in the distance into the lowering clouds of the gloomy evening sky. He almost thought that he must have missed the traces of the fearful beast ; when close beside him from a cleft in the rock issued a long growl, and a huge black bear appeared on the snow, standing on its hind legs, and with glaring eyes it advanced towards the baron. Sintram the while was struggling in vain to make his way up the rock against the masses of snow continually slipping down.

Joyful at a combat so long untried as almost to be new, Folko of Montfaucon levelled his hunting spear, and awaited the attack of the wild beast. He suffered it to approach so near that its fearful claws were almost upon him ; then he made a thrust, and the spear-head was buried deep in the bear's breast. But the furious beast still pressed on with a fierce growl, kept up on its hind legs by the cross-iron of the spear, and the knight was forced to plant his feet deep in the earth to resist the savage assault ; and ever close before him the grim and bloody face of the bear, and close in his ear its deep savage growl, wrung forth partly by the agony of death, partly by thirst for blood. At length the bear's resistance grew weaker, and the dark blood streamed freely upon the snow ; he tottered ; and one powerful thrust

hurled him backwards over the edge of the precipice. At the same instant Sintram stood by the Baron of Montfaucon. Folko said, drawing a deep breath: "But I have not yet the prize in my hands, and have it I must, since fortune has given me a claim to it. Look, one of my skates seems to be out of order. Thinkest thou, Sintram, that it holds enough to slide down to the foot of the precipice?"

"Let me go instead," said Sintram. "I will bring you the head and the claws of the bear."

"A true knight," replied Folko, with some displeasure, "never does a knightly deed by halves. What I ask is, whether my skate will still hold?"

As Sintram bent down to look, and was on the point of saying "No!" he suddenly heard a voice close to him, saying, "Why, yes, to be sure; there is no doubt about it."

Folko thought that Sintram had spoken, and slid down with the swiftness of an arrow, whilst his companion looked up in great surprise. The hated form of the little Master met his eyes. As he was going to address him with angry words, he heard the sound of the baron's fearful fall, and he stood still in silent horror. There was a breathless silence also in the abyss below.

"Now, why dost thou delay?" said the little Master, after a pause. "He is dashed to pieces. Go back to the castle, and take the fair Helen to thyself."

Sintram shuddered. Then his hateful companion began to praise Gabrielle's charms in so glowing, deceiving words, that the heart of the youth swelled with emotions he had never before known. He only thought of him who was now lying at the foot of the rock as of an obstacle removed between him and heaven: he turned towards the castle.

But a cry was heard below: "Help! help! my comrade! I am yet alive, but I am sorely wounded."

Sintram's will was changed, and he called to the baron, "I am coming."

But the little Master said, "Nothing can be done to help Duke Menelaus; and the fair Helen knows it already. She is only waiting for knight Paris to comfort her." And with detestable craft he wove in that tale with what was actually happening, bringing in the most highly wrought praises of the lovely Gabrielle; and alas! the dazzled youth yielded to him, and fled! Again he heard far off the baron's voice calling to him, "Knight Sintram, knight Sintram, thou on whom I bestowed the holy order, haste to me and help me! The she-bear and her whelps will be upon me, and I cannot use my right arm! Knight Sintram, knight Sintram, haste to help me!"

His cries were overpowered by the furious speed with which the two were carried along on their skates, and by the evil words of the little Master, who was mocking at the late proud bearing of Duke Menelaus towards the poor Sintram. At last he shouted, "Good luck to you, she-bear! good luck to your whelps! There is a glorious meal for you! Now you will feed upon the fear of Heathendom, him at whose name the Moorish brides weep, the mighty Baron of Montfaucon. Never again, O dainty knight, will you shout at the head of your troops, 'Mountjoy St. Denys!'" But scarce had this holy name passed the lips of the little Master, than he set up a howl of anguish, writhing himself with horrible contortions, and wringing his hands, and ended by disappearing in a storm of snow which then arose.

Sintram planted his staff firmly in the ground, and stopped. How strangely did the wide expanse of snow, the distant mountains rising above it, and the dark green fir-woods—how strangely did they all look at him in cold reproachful silence! He felt as if he must sink under the weight of his sorrow and his guilt. The bell of a distant hermitage came floating sadly over the plain. With a burst of tears he exclaimed, as the darkness grew thicker

round him, "My mother! my mother! I had once a beloved tender mother, and she said I was a good child!" A ray of comfort came to him as if brought on an angel's wing; perhaps Montfaucon was not yet dead! and he flew like lightning along the path, back to the steep rock. When he got to the fearful place, he stooped and looked anxiously down the precipice. The moon, just risen in full majesty, helped him. The Knight of Montfaucon, pale and bleeding, was half kneeling against the rock; his right arm, crushed in his fall, hung powerless at his side; it was plain that he could not draw his good sword out of the scabbard. But nevertheless he was keeping the bear and her young ones at bay by his bold threatening looks, so that they only crept round him, growling angrily; every moment ready for a fierce attack, but as often driven back affrighted at the majestic air by which he conquered even when defenceless.

"Oh! what a hero would there have perished!" groaned Sintram, "and through whose guilt?" In an instant his spear flew with so true an aim that the bear fell weltering in her blood; the young ones ran away howling.

The baron looked up with surprise. His countenance beamed as the light of the moon fell upon it, grave and stern, yet mild, like some angelic vision. "Come down!" he beckoned; and Sintram slid down the side of the precipice, full of anxious haste. He was going to attend to the wounded man, but Folko said, "First cut off the head and claws of the bear which I slew. I promised to bring the spoils of the chase to my lovely Gabrielle. Then come to me, and bind up my wounds. My right arm is broken." Sintram obeyed the baron's commands. When the tokens of victory had been secured, and the broken arm bound up, Folko desired the youth to help him back to the castle.

"O Heavens!" said Sintram in a low voice, "if I dared to look in your face! or only knew how to come near you!"

"Thou wert indeed going on in an evil course," said

Montfaucon, gravely ; " but how could we, any of us, stand before God, did not repentance help us? At any rate, thou hast now saved my life, and let that thought cheer thy heart."

The youth with tenderness and strength supported the baron's left arm, and they both went their way silently in the moonlight.

XVIII
CHAPTER

SOUNDS of wailing were heard from the castle as they approached; the chapel was solemnly lighted up; within it knelt Gabrielle, lamenting for the death of the Knight of Montfaucon.

But how quickly was all changed, when the noble baron, pale indeed, and bleeding, yet having escaped all mortal danger, stood smiling at the entrance of the holy building, and said, in a low, gentle voice, "Look up, Gabrielle, and be not affrighted; for, by the honour of my race, thy knight still lives." Oh! with what joy did Gabrielle's eyes sparkle, as she turned to her knight, and then raised them again to heaven, still streaming, but from the deep source of thankful joy! With the help of two pages, Folko knelt down beside her, and they both sanctified their happiness with a silent prayer.

When they left the chapel, the wounded knight being tenderly supported by his lady, Sintram was standing with-

out in the darkness, himself as gloomy as the night, and, like a bird of the night, shunning the sight of men. Yet he came trembling forward into the torch-light, laid the bear's head and claws at the feet of Gabrielle, and said, "The noble Folko of Montfaucon presents the spoils of to-day's chase to his lady."

The Norwegians burst forth with shouts of joyful surprise at the stranger knight, who in the very first hunting expedition had slain the most fearful and dangerous beast of their mountains.

Then Folko looked around with a smile as he said, "And now none of you must jeer at me, if I stay at home for a short time with my timid wife."

Those who the day before had talked together in the armourer's forge came out from the crowd, and bowing low, they replied, "Noble baron, who could have thought that there was no knightly exercise in the whole world in the which you would not show yourself far above all other men?"

"The pupil of old Sir Hugh may be somewhat trusted," answered Folko kindly. "But now, you bold northern warriors, bestow some praises also on my deliverer, who saved me from the claws of the she-bear, when I was leaning against the rock wounded by my fall."

He pointed to Sintram, and the general shout was again raised; and old Rolf, with tears of joy in his eyes, bent his head over his foster-son's hand. But Sintram drew back shuddering.

"Did you but know," said he, "whom you see before you, all your spears would be aimed at my heart; and perhaps that would be the best thing for me. But I spare the honour of my father and of his race, and for this time I will not confess. Only this much must you know, noble warriors——"

"Young man," interrupted Folko with a reproving look,

"already again so wild and fierce? I desire that thou wilt hold thy peace about thy dreaming fancies."

Sintram was silenced for a moment; but hardly had Folko begun smilingly to move towards the steps of the castle, than he cried out, "Oh, no, no, noble wounded knight, stay yet awhile; I will serve thee in everything that thy heart can desire; but herein I cannot serve thee. Brave warriors, you must and shall know so much as this; I am no longer worthy to live under the same roof with the noble Baron of Montfaucon and his angelic wife Gabrielle. And you, my aged father, good-night; long not for me. I intend to live in the stone fortress on the Rocks of the Moon, till a change of some kind come over me."

There was that in his way of speaking against which no one dared to set himself, not even Folko.

The wild Biorn bowed his head humbly, and said, "Do according to thy pleasure, my poor son; for I fear that thou art right."

Then Sintram walked solemnly and silently through the castle-gate, followed by the good Rolf. Gabrielle led her exhausted lord up to their apartments.

XIX
CHAPTER

THAT was a mournful journey on which the youth and his aged foster-father went towards the Rocks of the Moon, through the wild tangled paths of the snow-clad valleys. Rolf from time to time sang some verses of hymns, in which comfort and peace were promised to the penitent sinner, and Sintram thanked him for them with looks of grateful sadness. Neither of them spoke a word else.

At length, when the dawn of day was approaching, Sintram broke silence by saying, "Who are those two sitting yonder by the frozen stream—a tall man and a little one? Their own wild hearts must have driven them also forth into the wilderness. Rolf, dost thou know them? The sight of them makes me shudder."

Sintram meets his companions.—*p.* 99.

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"Sir," answered the old man, "your disturbed mind deceives you. There stands a lofty fir-tree, and the old weather-beaten stump of an oak, half-covered with snow, which gives them a somewhat strange appearance. There are no men sitting yonder."

"But, Rolf, look there! look again carefully! Now they move, they whisper together."

"Sir, the morning breeze moves the branches, and whistles in the sharp pine-leaves and in the yellow oak-leaves, and rustles the crisp snow."

"Rolf, now they are both coming towards us. Now they are standing before us, quite close."

"Sir, it is we who get nearer to them as we walk on, and the setting moon throws such long giant-like shadows over the plain."

"Good-evening!" said a hollow voice; and Sintram knew it was the crazy pilgrim, near to whom stood the malignant little Master, looking more hideous than ever.

"You are right, sir knight," whispered Rolf, as he drew back behind Sintram, and made the Sign of the Cross on his breast and his forehead.

The bewildered youth, however, advanced towards the two figures, and said, "You have always taken wonderful pleasure in being my companions. What do you expect will come of it? And do you choose to go now with me to the stone fortress? There I will tend thee, poor pale pilgrim; and as to thee, frightful Master, most evil dwarf, I will make thee shorter by the head, to reward thee for thy deeds yesterday."

"That would be a fine thing," sneered the little Master; "and perhaps thou imaginest that thou wouldst be doing a great service to the whole world? And, indeed, who knows? Something might be gained by it! Only, poor wretch, thou canst not do it."

The pilgrim meantime was waving his pale head to and fro thoughtfully, saying, "I believe truly that thou wouldst willingly have me, and I would go to thee willingly, but I may not yet. Have patience awhile; thou wilt yet surely see me come, but at a distant time; and first we must again visit thy father together, and then also thou wilt learn to call me by my right name, my poor friend."

"Beware of disappointing me again!" said the little Master to the pilgrim in a threatening voice; but he, pointing with his long, shrivelled hand towards the sun, which was just now rising, said, "Stop either that sun or me, if thou canst!"

Then the first rays fell on the snow, and the little Master ran, muttering, down a precipice; but the pilgrim walked on in the bright beams, calmly and with great solemnity, towards a neighbouring castle on the mountain. It was not long before its chapel-bell was heard tolling for the dead.

"For Heaven's sake," whispered the good Rolf to his knight—"for Heaven's sake, Sir Sintram, what kind of companions have you here? One of them cannot bear the light of God's blessed sun, and the other has no sooner set foot in a dwelling than tidings of death wail after his track. Could he have been a murderer?"

"I do not think that," said Sintram. "He seemed to me the best of the two. But it is a strange wilfulness of his not to come with me. Did I not invite him kindly? I believe that he can sing well, and he should have sung to me some gentle lullaby. Since my mother has lived in a cloister, no one sings lullabies to me any more."

At this tender recollection his eyes were bedewed with tears. But he did not himself know what he had said besides, for there was wildness and confusion in his spirit. They arrived at the Rocks of the Moon, and mounted up to the stone fortress. The castellan, an old, gloomy man,

the more devoted to the young knight from his dark melancholy and wild deeds, hastened to lower the drawbridge. Greetings were exchanged in silence, and in silence did Sintram enter, and those joyless gates closed with a crash behind the future recluse.

XX
CHAPTER

YES truly, a recluse, or at least something like it, did poor Sintram now become! For towards the time of the approaching Christmas festival his fearful dreams came over him, and seized him so fiercely, that all the esquires and servants fled with shrieks out of the castle, and would never venture back again. No one remained with him except Rolf and the old castellan. After a while, indeed, Sintram became calm, but he went about looking so pallid and still that he might have been taken for a wandering corpse. No comforting of the good Rolf, no devout soothing lays, were of any avail; and the castellan, with his fierce, scarred features, his head almost

entirely bald from a huge sword-cut, his stubborn silence, seemed like a yet darker shadow of the miserable knight. Rolf often thought of going to summon the holy chaplain of Drontheim; but how could he have left his lord alone with the gloomy castellan, a man who at all times raised in him a secret horror? Biorn had long had this wild strange warrior in his service, and honoured him on account of his unshaken fidelity and his fearless courage, though neither the knight nor any one else knew whence the castellan came, nor, indeed, exactly who he was. Very few people knew by what name to call him; but that was the more needless, since he never entered into discourse with any one. He was the castellan of the stone fortress on the Rocks of the Moon, and nothing more.

Rolf committed his deep heartfelt cares to the merciful God, trusting that he would soon come to his aid; and the merciful God did not fail him. For on Christmas eve the bell at the drawbridge sounded, and Rolf, looking over the battlements, saw the chaplain of Drontheim standing there, with a companion indeed that surprised him,—for close beside him appeared the crazy pilgrim, and the dead men's bones on his dark mantle shone very strangely in the glimmering starlight: but the sight of the chaplain filled the good Rolf too full of joy to leave room for any doubt in his mind; for, thought he, whoever comes with *him* cannot but be welcome! And so he let them both in with respectful haste, and ushered them up to the hall, where Sintram, pale and with a fixed look, was sitting under the light of one flickering lamp. Rolf was obliged to support and assist the crazy pilgrim up the stairs, for he was quite benumbed with cold.

"I bring you a greeting from your mother," said the chaplain as he came in; and immediately a sweet smile passed over the young knight's countenance, and its deadly pallidness gave place to a bright soft glow.

"O Heaven!" murmured he, "does then my mother yet live, and does she care to know anything about me?"

"She is endowed with a wonderful presentiment of the future," replied the chaplain; "and all that you ought either to do or to leave undone is faithfully mirrored in various ways in her mind, during a half-waking trance. Now she knows of your deep sorrow, and she sends me, the father-confessor of her convent, to comfort you, but at the same time to warn you; for, as she affirms, and as I am also inclined to think, many strange and heavy trials lie before you."

Sintram bowed himself towards the chaplain with his arms crossed over his breast, and said, with a gentle smile, "Much have I been favoured—more, a thousand times more, than I could have dared to hope in my best hours—by this greeting from my mother, and your visit, reverend sir; and all after falling more fearfully low than I had ever fallen before. The mercy of the Lord is great; and how heavy soever may be the weight and punishment which He may send, I trust, with His grace, to be able to bear it."

Just then the door opened, and the castellan came in with a torch in his hand, the red glare of which made his face look the colour of blood. He cast a terrified glance at the crazy pilgrim, who had just sunk back in a swoon, and was supported on his seat and tended by Rolf; then he stared with astonishment at the chaplain, and at last murmured, "A strange meeting! I believe that the hour for confession and reconciliation is now arrived."

"I believe so too," replied the priest, who had heard his low whisper; "this seems to be truly a day rich in grace and peace. That poor man yonder, whom I found half-frozen by the way, would make a full confession to me at once, before he followed me to a place of shelter. Do as he has done, my dark-browed warrior, and delay not your good purpose for one instant."

Thereupon he left the room with the willing castellan, but he turned back to say, "Sir Knight and your esquire! take good care the while of my sick charge."

Sintram and Rolf did according to the chaplain's desire: and when at length their cordials made the pilgrim open his eyes once again, the young knight said to him, with a friendly smile, "Seest thou? thou art come to visit me after all. Why didst thou refuse me when, a few nights ago, I asked thee so earnestly to come? Perhaps I may have spoken wildly and hastily. Did that scare thee away?"

A sudden expression of fear came over the pilgrim's countenance; but soon he again looked up at Sintram with an air of gentle humility, saying, "O my dear, dear lord, I am most entirely devoted to you—only never speak to me of former passages between you and me. I am terrified whenever you do it. For, my lord, either I am mad and have forgotten all that is past, or that Being has met you in the wood, whom I look upon as my very powerful twin brother."

Sintram laid his hand gently on the pilgrim's mouth, as he answered, "Say nothing more about that matter: I most willingly promise to be silent."

Neither he nor old Rolf could understand what appeared to them so awful in the whole matter; but both shuddered.

After a short pause the pilgrim said, "I would rather sing you a song—a soft, comforting song. Have you not a lute here?"

Rolf fetched one; and the pilgrim, half-raising himself on the couch, sang the following words:

"When death is coming near,
When thy heart shrinks in fear
And thy limbs fail,
Then raise thy hands and pray
To Him who smooths thy way
Through the dark vale,

Seest thou the eastern dawn,
Hearst thou in the red morn
The angel's song?
Oh, lift thy drooping head,
Thou who in gloom and dread
Hast lain so long.

Death comes to set thee free;
Oh, meet him cheerily
As thy true friend,
And all thy fears shall cease,
And in eternal peace
Thy penance end."

"Amen," said Sintram and Rolf, folding their hands; and whilst the last chords of the lute still resounded, the chaplain and the castellan came slowly and gently into the room. "I bring a precious Christmas gift," said the priest. "After many sad years, hope of reconciliation and peace of conscience are returning to a noble, disturbed mind. This concerns thee, beloved pilgrim; and do thou, my Sintram, with a joyful trust in God, take encouragement and example from it."

"More than twenty years ago," began the castellan, at a sign from the chaplain—"more than twenty years ago I was a bold shepherd, driving my flock up the mountains. A young knight followed me, whom they called Weigand the Slender. He wanted to buy of me my favourite little lamb for his fair bride, and offered me much red gold for it. I sturdily refused. Over-bold youth boiled up in us both. A stroke of his sword hurled me senseless down the precipice."

"Not killed?" asked the pilgrim in a scarce audible voice.

"I am no ghost," replied the castellan, somewhat morosely; and then, after an earnest look from the priest, he continued, more humbly: "I recovered slowly and in solitude, with the help of remedies which were easily found

by me, a shepherd, in our productive valleys. When I came back into the world, no man knew me, with my scarred face, and my now bald head. I heard a report going through the country, that on account of this deed of his, Sir Weigand the Slender had been rejected by his fair betrothed Verena, and how he had pined away, and she had wished to retire into a convent, but her father had persuaded her to marry the great knight Biorn. Then there came a fearful thirst for vengeance into my heart, and I disowned my name, and my kindred, and my home, and entered the service of the mighty Biorn, as a strange wild man, in order that Weigand the Slender should always remain a murderer, and that I might feed on his anguish. So have I fed upon it for all these long years; I have fed frightfully upon his self-imposed banishment, upon his cheerless return home, upon his madness. But to-day—" and hot tears gushed from his eyes—"but to-day God has broken the hardness of my heart; and, dear Sir Weigand, look upon yourself no more as a murderer, and say that you will forgive me, and pray for him who has done you so fearful an injury, and——"

Sobs choked his words. He fell at the feet of the pilgrim, who with tears of joy pressed him to his heart, in token of forgiveness.

XXI
CHAPTER

THE joy of this hour passed from its first overpowering brightness to the calm, thoughtful aspect of daily life; and Weigand, now restored to health, laid aside the mantle with dead men's bones, saying: "I had chosen for my penance to carry these fearful remains about with me, with the thought that some of them might have belonged to him whom I have murdered. Therefore I sought for them round about, in the deep beds of the mountain-torrents, and in the high nests of the eagles and vultures. And while I was searching, I sometimes—could it have been only an illusion?—seemed to meet a being who was very like myself, but far, far more powerful, and yet still paler and more haggard."

An imploring look from Sintram stopped the flow of his words. With a gentle smile, Weigand bowed towards him, and said: "You know now all the deep, unutterably deep, sorrow which preyed upon me. My fear of you, and my yearning love for you, are no longer an enigma to your kind heart. For, dear youth, though you may be like your fearful father, you have also the kind, gentle heart of your mother; and its reflection brightens your pallid, stern features, like the glow of a morning sky, which lights up ice-covered mountains and snowy valleys with the soft radiance of joy. But, alas! how long you have lived alone amidst your fellow-creatures! and how long since you have seen your mother, my dearly-loved Sintram!"

"I feel, too, as though a spring were gushing up in the barren wilderness," replied the youth; "and I should perchance be altogether restored, could I but keep you long with me, and weep with you, dear lord. But I have that within me which says that you will very soon be taken from me."

"I believe, indeed," said the pilgrim, "that my late song was very nearly my last, and that it contained a prediction full soon to be accomplished in me. But, as the soul of man is always like the thirsty ground, the more blessings God has bestowed on us, the more earnestly do we look out for new ones; so would I crave for one more before, as I hope, my blessed end. Yet, indeed, it cannot be granted me," added he, with a faltering voice; "for I feel myself too utterly unworthy of so high a gift."

"But it will be granted!" said the chaplain, joyfully. "'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted;' and I fear not to take one purified from murder to receive a farewell from the holy and forgiving countenance of Verena."

The pilgrim stretched both his hands up towards heaven, and an unspoken thanksgiving poured from his beaming eyes, and brightened the smile that played on his lips.

Sintram looked sorrowfully on the ground, and sighed gently to himself: "Alas! who would dare accompany?"

"My poor, good Sintram," said the chaplain, in a tone of the softest kindness, "I understand thee well; but the time is not yet come. The powers of evil will again raise up their wrathful heads within thee, and Verena must check both her own and thy longing desires, until all is pure in thy spirit as in hers. Comfort thyself with the thought that God looks mercifully upon thee, and that the joy so earnestly sought for will come—if not here, most assuredly beyond the grave."

But the pilgrim, as though awaking out of a trance, rose mightily from his seat, and said: "Do you please to come forth with me, reverend chaplain? Before the sun appears in the heavens, we could reach the convent-gates, and I should not be far from heaven."

In vain did the chaplain and Rolf remind him of his weakness: he smiled, and said that there could be no words about it; and he girded himself, and tuned the lute which he had asked leave to take with him. His decided manner overcame all opposition, almost without words; and the chaplain had already prepared himself for the journey, when the pilgrim looked with much emotion at Sintram, who, oppressed with a strange weariness, had sunk, half-asleep, on a couch, and said: "Wait a moment. I know that he wants me to give him a soft lullaby." The pleased smile of the youth seemed to say, Yes; and the pilgrim, touching the strings with a light hand, sang these words:

"Sleep peacefully, dear boy;
Thy mother sends the song
That whispers round thy couch,
To lull thee all night long.
In silence and afar
For thee she ever prays,
And longs once more in fondness
Upon thy face to gaze.

And when thy waking cometh,
  Then in thy every deed,
In all that may betide thee,
  Unto her words give heed.
Oh, listen for her voice,
  If it be yea or nay;
And though temptation meet thee,
  Thou shalt not miss the way.

If thou canst listen rightly,
  And nobly onward go,
Then pure and gentle breezes
  Around thy cheek shall blow.
Then on thy peaceful journey
  Her blessing thou shalt feel,
And though from thee divided,
  Her presence o'er thee steal.

O safest, sweetest comfort!
  O blest and living light!
That, strong in Heaven's power,
  All terrors put to flight!
Rest quietly, sweet child,
  And may the gentle numbers
Thy mother sends to thee
  Waft peace unto thy slumbers."

Sintram fell into a deep sleep, smiling, and breathing softly. Rolf and the castellan remained by his bed, whilst the two travellers pursued their way in the quiet starlight.

XXII
CHAPTER

THE dawn had almost appeared, when Rolf, who had been asleep, was awakened by low singing; and as he looked round, he perceived, with surprise, that the sounds came from the lips of the castellan, who said, as if in explanation, "So does Sir Weigand sing at the convent-gates, and they are kindly opened to him." Upon which, old Rolf fell asleep again, uncertain whether what had passed had been a dream or a reality. After a while the bright sunshine awoke him again; and when he rose up, he saw the countenance of the castellan wonderfully illuminated by the red morning rays; and altogether those features, once so fearful, were shining with a soft, nay almost child-like

mildness. The mysterious man seemed to be the while listening to the motionless air, as if he were hearing a most pleasant discourse or lofty music ; and as Rolf was about to speak, he made him a sign of entreaty to remain quiet, and continued in his eager listening attitude.

At length he sank slowly and contentedly back in his seat, whispering, "God be praised! She has granted his last prayer ; he will be laid in the burial-ground of the convent, and now he has forgiven me in the depths of his heart. I can assure you that he finds a peaceful end."

Rolf did not dare ask a question, or awake his lord ; he felt as if one already departed had spoken to him.

The castellan long remained still, always smiling brightly. At last he raised himself a little, again listened, and said, "It is over. The sound of the bells is very sweet. We have overcome. Oh, how soft and easy does the good God make it to us!" And so it came to pass. He stretched himself back as if weary, and his soul was freed from his care-worn body.

Rolf now gently awoke his young knight, and pointed to the smiling dead. And Sintram smiled too ; he and his good esquire fell on their knees, and prayed to God for the departed spirit. Then they rose up, and bore the cold body to the vaulted hall, and watched by it with holy candles until the return of the chaplain. That the pilgrim would not come back again, they very well knew.

Accordingly towards mid-day the chaplain returned alone. He could scarcely do more than confirm what was already known to them. He only added a comforting and hopeful greeting from Sintram's mother to her son, and told that the blissful Weigand had fallen asleep like a tired child, whilst Verena, with calm tenderness, held a crucifix before him.

"And in eternal peace our penance end!"

sang Sintram, gently to himself : and they prepared a last

resting-place for the now so peaceful castellan, and laid him therein with all the due solemn rites.

The chaplain was obliged soon afterwards to depart ; but bidding Sintram farewell, he again said kindly to him, " Thy dear mother assuredly knows how gentle and calm and good thou art now ! "

XXIII
CHAPTER

IN the castle of Sir Biorn of the Fiery Eyes, Christmas-eve had not passed so brightly and happily; but yet, there too all had gone visibly according to God's will.

Folko, at the entreaty of the lord of the castle, had allowed Gabrielle to support him into the hall; and the three now sat at the round stone table, whereon a sumptuous meal was laid. On either side there were long tables, at which sat the retainers of both knights in full armour, according to the custom of the North. Torches and lamps lighted the lofty hall with an almost dazzling brightness.

Midnight had now begun its solemn reign, and Gabrielle softly reminded her wounded knight to withdraw. Biorn

heard her, and said : "You are right, fair lady; our knight needs rest. Only let us first keep up one more old honourable custom."

And at his sign four attendants brought in with pomp a great boar's head, which looked as if cut out of solid gold, and placed it in the middle of the stone table. Biorn's retainers rose with reverence, and took off their helmets ; Biorn himself did the same.

"What means this?" asked Folko very gravely.

"What thy forefathers and mine have done on every Yule feast," answered Biorn. "We are going to make vows on the boar's head, and then pass the goblet round to their fulfilment."

"We no longer keep what our ancestors called the Yule feast," said Folko ; "we are good Christians, and we keep holy Christmas-tide."

"To do the one, and not to leave the other undone," answered Biorn. "I hold my ancestors too dear to forget their knightly customs. Those who think otherwise may act according to their wisdom, but that shall not hinder me. I swear by the golden boar's head——" And he stretched out his hand, to lay it solemnly upon it.

But Folko called out, "In the name of our holy Saviour, forbear. Where I am, and still have breath and will, none shall celebrate undisturbed the rites of the wild heathens."

Biorn of the Fiery Eyes glared angrily at him. The men of the two barons separated from each other, with a hollow sound of rattling armour, and ranged themselves in two bodies on either side of the hall, each behind its leader. Already here and there helmets were fastened and visors closed.

"Bethink thee yet what thou art doing," said Biorn. "I was about to vow an eternal union with the house of Montfaucon, nay, even to bind myself to do it grateful homage ; but if thou disturb me in the customs which have come

to me from my forefathers, look to thy safety and the safety of all that is dear to thee. My wrath no longer knows any bounds."

Folko made a sign to the pale Gabrielle to retire behind his followers, saying to her, "Be of good cheer, my noble wife, weaker Christians have braved, for the sake of God and of His holy Church, greater dangers than now seem to threaten us. Believe me, the Lord of Montfaucon is not so easily ensnared."

Gabrielle obeyed, something comforted by Folko's fearless smile, but this smile inflamed yet more the fury of Biorn. He again stretched out his hand towards the boar's head, as if about to make some dreadful vow, when Folko snatched a gauntlet of Biorn's off the table, with which he, with his unwounded left arm, struck so powerful a blow on the gilt idol, that it fell crashing to the ground, shivered to pieces. Biorn and his followers stood as if turned to stone. But soon swords were grasped by armed hands, shields were taken down from the walls, and an angry, threatening murmur sounded through the hall.

At a sign from Folko, a battle-axe was brought him by one of his faithful retainers; he swung it high in air with his powerful left hand, and stood looking like an avenging angel as he spoke these words through the tumult with awful calmness: "What seek ye, O deluded Northman? What wouldst thou, sinful lord? Ye are indeed become heathens; and I hope to show you, by my readiness for battle, that it is not in my right arm alone that God has put strength for victory. But if ye can yet hear, listen to my words. Biorn, on this same accursed, and now, by God's help, shivered boar's head, thou didst lay thy hand when thou didst swear to sacrifice any inhabitants of the German towns that should fall into thy power. And Gotthard Lenz came, and Rudlieb came, driven on these shores by the storm. What didst thou then do, O savage Biorn? What did ye

do at his bidding, ye who were keeping the Yule feast with him? Try your fortune on me. The Lord will be with me, as He was with those holy men. To arms, and—" (he turned to his warriors) "let our battle-cry be Gotthard and Rudlieb!"

Then Biorn let drop his drawn sword, then his followers paused, and none among the Norwegians dared lift his eyes from the ground. By degrees, they one by one began to disappear from the hall; and at last Biorn stood quite alone opposite to the baron and his followers. He seemed hardly aware that he had been deserted, but he fell on his knees, stretched out his shining sword, pointed to the broken boar's head, and said, "Do with me as you have done with that; I deserve no better. I ask but one favour, only one; do not disgrace me, noble baron, by seeking shelter in another castle of Norway."

"I fear you not," answered Folko, after some thought; "and, as far as may be, I freely forgive you." Then he drew the sign of the cross over the wild form of Biorn, and left the hall with Gabrielle. The retainers of the house of Montfaucon followed him proudly and silently.

The hard spirit of the fierce lord of the castle was now quite broken, and he watched with increased humility every look of Folko and Gabrielle. But they withdrew more and more into the happy solitude of their own apartments, where they enjoyed, in the midst of the sharp winter, a bright spring-tide of happiness. The wounded condition of Folko did not hinder the evening delights of songs and music and poetry—but rather a new charm was added to them when the tall, handsome knight leant on the arm of his delicate lady, and they thus, changing as it were their deportment and duties, walked slowly through the torch-lit halls, scattering their kindly greetings like flowers among the crowds of men and women.

All this time little or nothing was heard of poor Sin-

tram. The last wild outbreak of his father had increased the terror with which Gabrielle remembered the self-accusations of the youth; and the more resolutely Folko kept silence, the more did she bode some dreadful mystery. Indeed, a secret shudder came over the knight when he thought on the pale, dark-haired youth. Sintram's repentance had bordered on settled despair; no one knew even what he was doing in the fortress of evil report on the Rocks of the Moon. Strange rumours were brought by the retainers who had fled from it, that the evil spirit had obtained complete power over Sintram, that no man could stay with him, and that the fidelity of the dark mysterious castellan had cost him his life.

Folko could hardly drive away the fearful suspicion that the lonely young knight was become a wicked magician.

And perhaps, indeed, evil spirits did flit about the banished Sintram, but it was without his calling them up. In his dreams he often saw the wicked enchantress Venus, in her golden chariot drawn by winged cats, pass over the battlements of the stone fortress, and heard her say, mocking him, 'Foolish Sintram, foolish Sintram! hadst thou but obeyed the little Master! Thou wouldst now be in Helen's arms, and the Rocks of the Moon would be called the Rocks of Love, and the stone fortress would be the garden of roses. Thou wouldst have lost thy pale face and dark hair,—for thou art only enchanted, dear youth,—and thine eyes would have beamed more softly, and thy cheeks bloomed more freshly, and thy hair would have been more golden than was that of Prince Paris when men wondered at his beauty. Oh, how Helen would have loved thee!" Then she showed him in a mirror, how, as a marvellously beautiful knight, he knelt before Gabrielle, who sank into his arms blushing as the morning. When he awoke from such dreams, he would seize eagerly the sword and scarf given him by his lady,—as a shipwrecked man seizes the

plank which is to save him; and while the hot tears fell on them, he would murmur to himself, "There was, indeed, one hour in my sad life when I was worthy and happy."

Once he sprang up at midnight after one of these dreams, but this time with more thrilling horror; for it had seemed to him that the features of the enchantress Venus had changed towards the end of her speech, as she looked down upon him with marvellous scorn, and she appeared to him as the hideous little Master. The youth had no better means of calming his distracted mind than to throw the sword and scarf of Gabrielle over his shoulders, and to hasten forth under the solemn starry canopy of the wintry sky. He walked in deep thought backwards and forwards under the leafless oaks and the snow-laden firs which grew on the high ramparts.

Then he heard a sorrowful cry of distress sound from the moat; it was as if some one were attempting to sing, but was stopped by inward grief. Sintram exclaimed, "Who's there?" and all was still. When he was silent, and again began his walk, the frightful groanings and moanings were heard afresh, as if they came from a dying person. Sintram overcame the horror which seemed to hold him back, and began in silence to climb down into the deep dry moat which was cut in the rock. He was soon so low down that he could no longer see the stars shining; beneath him moved a shrouded form; and sliding with involuntary haste down the steep descent, he stood near the groaning figure; it ceased its lamentations, and began to laugh like a maniac from beneath its long, folded, female garments.

"Oh ho, my comrade! oh ho, my comrade! wert thou going a little too fast? Well, well, it is all right; and see now, thou standest no higher than I, my pious, valiant youth! Take it patiently,—take it patiently!"

"What dost thou want with me? Why dost thou laugh? why dost thou weep?" asked Sintram impatiently.

"I might ask thee the same questions," answered the dark figure, "and thou wouldst be less able to answer me than I to answer thee. Why dost thou laugh? why dost thou weep?—Poor creature! But I will show thee a remarkable thing in thy fortress, of which thou knowest nothing. Give heed!"

And the shrouded figure began to scratch and scrape at the stones till a little iron door opened, and showed a long passage which led into the deep darkness.

"Wilt thou come with me?" whispered the strange being: "it is the shortest way to thy father's castle. In half-an-hour we shall come out of this passage, and we shall be in thy beauteous lady's apartment. Duke Menelaus shall lie in a magic sleep,—leave that to me,—and then thou wilt take the slight, delicate form in thine arms, and bring her to the Rocks of the Moon; so thou wilt win back all that seemed lost by thy former wavering."

Sintram trembled visibly, fearfully shaken to and fro by the fever of passion and the stings of conscience. But at last, pressing the sword and scarf to his heart, he cried out, "Oh! that fairest, most glorious hour of my life! If I lose all other joys, I will hold fast that brightest hour!"

"A bright, glorious hour!" said the figure from under its veil, like an evil echo. "Dost thou know whom thou then conqueredst? A good old friend, who only showed himself so sturdy to give thee the glory of overcoming him. Wilt thou convince thyself? Wilt thou look?"

The dark garments of the little figure flew open, and the dwarf warrior in strange armour, the gold horns on his helmet, and the curved spear in his hand, the very same whom Sintram thought he had slain on Niflung's Heath, now stood before him and laughed: "Thou seest,

my youth, everything in the wide world is but dreams and froth; wherefore hold fast the dream which delights thee, and sip up the froth which refreshes thee! Hasten to that underground passage, it leads up to thy angel Helen. Or wouldst thou first know thy friend yet better?"

His visor opened, and the hateful face of the little Master glared upon the knight. Sintram asked, as if in a dream, "Art thou also that wicked enchantress Venus?"

"Something like her," answered the little Master, laughing, "or rather she is something like me. And if thou wilt only get disenchanted, and recover the beauty of Prince of Paris,—then, O Prince Paris," and his voice changed to an alluring song, "then, O Prince Paris, I shall be fair like thee!"

At this moment the good Rolf appeared above on the rampart; a consecrated taper in his lantern shone down into the moat, as he sought for the missing young knight. "In God's name, Sir Sintram," he called out, "what has the spectre of whom you slew on Niflung's Heath, and whom I never could bury, to do with you?"

"Seest thou well? hearest thou well?" whispered the little Master, and drew back into the darkness of the underground passage. "The wise man up there knows me well. There was nothing in thy heroic feat. Come, take the joys of life while thou mayst."

But Sintram sprang back, with a strong effort, into the circle of light made by the shining of the taper from above, and cried out, "Depart from me, unquiet spirit! I know well that I bear a name on me in which thou canst have no part."

Little Master rushed in fear and rage into the passage, and, yelling, shut the iron door behind him. It seemed as if he could still be heard groaning and roaring.

Sintram climbed up the wall of the moat, and made a sign to his foster-father not to speak to him: he only said,

"One of my best joys, yes, the very best, has been taken from me; but, by God's help, I am not yet lost."

In the earliest light of the following morning, he and Rolf stopped up the entrance to the perilous passage with huge blocks of stone.

XXIV

CHAPTER

THE long northern winter was at last ended, the fresh green leaves rustled merrily in the woods, patches of soft moss twinkled amongst the rocks, the valleys grew green, the brooks sparkled, the snow melted from all but the highest mountain-tops, and the bark which was ready to carry away Folko and Gabrielle danced on the sunny waves of the sea. The baron, now quite recovered, and strong and fresh as though his health had sustained no injury, stood one morning on the shore with his fair lady; and, full of glee at the prospect of returning to their home, the noble pair looked on well pleased at their attendants who were busied in lading the ship.

Then said one of them in the midst of a confused sound

of talking: "But what has appeared to me the most fearful and the most strange thing in this northern land is the stone fortress on the Rocks of the Moon: I have never, indeed, been inside it, but when I used to see it in our huntings, towering above the tall fir-trees, there came a tightness over my breast, as if something unearthly were dwelling in it. And a few weeks ago, when the snow was yet lying hard in the valleys, I came unawares quite close upon the strange building. The young knight Sintram was walking alone on the ramparts as twilight came on, like the spirit of a departed knight, and he drew from the lute which he carried such soft, melancholy tones, and he sighed so deeply and sorrowfully ...."

The voice of the speaker was drowned in the noise of the crowd, and as he also just then reached the ship with his package hastily fastened up, Folko and Gabrielle could not hear the rest of his speech. But the fair lady looked on her knight with eyes dim with tears, and sighed: "Is it not behind those mountains that the Rocks of the Moon lie? The unhappy Sintram makes me sad at heart."

"I understand thee, sweet gracious lady, and the pure compassion of thy heart," replied Folko; instantly ordering his swift-footed steed to be brought. He placed his noble lady under the charge of his retainers, and leaping into the saddle, he hastened, followed by the grateful smiles of Gabrielle, along the valley towards the stone fortress.

Sintram was seated near the drawbridge, touching the strings of the lute, and shedding some tears on the golden chords, almost as Montfaucon's esquire had described him. Suddenly a cloudy shadow passed over him, and he looked up, expecting to see a flight of cranes in the air; but the sky was clear and blue. While the young knight was still wondering, a long bright spear fell at his feet from a battlement of the armoury turret.

"Take it up,—make good use of it! thy foe is near at

hand! Near also is the downfall of thy dearest happiness." Thus he heard it distinctly whispered in his ear; and it seemed to him that he saw the shadow of the little Master glide close by him to a neighbouring cleft in the rock. But at the same time also, a tall, gigantic, haggard figure passed along the valley, in some measure like the departed pilgrim, only much, very much, larger, and he raised his long bony arm fearfully threatening, then disappeared in an ancient tomb.

At the very same instant Sir Folko of Montfaucon came swiftly as the wind up the Rocks of the Moon, and he must have seen something of those strange apparitions, for as he stopped close behind Sintram, he looked rather pale, and asked low and earnestly: "Sir knight, who are those two with whom you were just now holding converse here?"

"The good God knows," answered Sintram; "I know them not."

"If the good God does but know!" cried Montfaucon: "but I fear me that He knows very little more of you or your deeds."

"You speak strangely harsh words," said Sintram. "Yet ever since that evening of misery,—alas! and even long before,—I must bear with all that comes from you. Dear sir, you may believe me, I know not those fearful companions; I call them not, and I know not what terrible curse binds them to my footsteps. The merciful God, as I would hope, is mindful of me the while,—as a faithful shepherd does not forget even the worst and most widely-straying of his flock, but calls after it with an anxious voice in the gloomy wilderness."

Then the anger of the baron was quite melted. Two bright tears stood in his eyes, and he said: "No, assuredly, God has not forgotten thee; only do thou not forget thy gracious God. I did not come to rebuke thee—I came to bless thee in Gabrielle's name and in my own. The Lord

preserve thee, the Lord guide thee, the Lord lift thee up! And, Sintram, on the far-off shores of Normandy I shall bear thee in mind, and I shall hear how thou strugglest against the curse which weighs down thy unhappy life; and if thou ever shake it off, and stand as a noble conqueror over Sin and Death, then thou shalt receive from me a token of love and reward, more precious then either thou or I can understand at this moment."

The words flowed prophetically from the baron's lips; he himself was only half-conscious of what he said. With a kind salutation he turned his noble steed, and again flew down the valley towards the sea-shore.

"Fool, fool! thrice a fool!" whispered the angry voice of the little Master in Sintram's ear. But old Rolf was singing his morning hymn in clear tones within the castle, and the last lines were these:—

"Whom worldlings scorn,
Who lives forlorn,
On God's own word doth rest;
With heavenly light
His path is bright,
His lot among the blest."

Then a holy joy took possession of Sintram's heart, and he looked around him yet more gladly than in the hour when Gabrielle gave him the scarf and sword, and Folko dubbed him knight.

XXV
CHAPTER

THE baron and his lovely lady were sailing across the broad sea with favouring gales of spring, nay the coast of Normandy had already appeared above the waves; but still was Biorn of the Fiery Eye sitting gloomy and speechless in his castle. He had taken no leave of his guests. There was more of proud fear of Montfaucon than of reverential love for him in his soul, especially since the adventure with the boar's head; and the thought was bitter to his haughty spirit, that the great baron, the flower and glory of their whole race, should have come in peace to visit him, and should now be departing in displeasure, in stern reproachful displeasure. He had constantly before

his mind, and it never failed to bring fresh pangs, the remembrance of how all had come to pass, and how all might have gone otherwise ; and he was always fancying he could hear the songs in which after generations would recount this voyage of the great Folko, and the worthlessness of the savage Biorn. At length, full of fierce anger, he cast away the fetters of his troubled spirit, he burst out of the castle with all his horsemen, and began to carry on a warfare more fearful and more lawless than any in which he had yet been engaged.

Sintram heard the sound of his father's war-horn ; and committing the stone fortress to old Rolf, he sprang forth ready armed for the combat. But the flames of the cottages and farms on the mountains rose up before him, and showed him, written as if in characters of fire, what kind of war his father was waging. Yet he went on towards the spot where the army was mustered, but only to offer his mediation, affirming that he would not lay his hand on his good sword in so abhorred a service, even though the stone fortress, and his father's castle besides, should fall before the vengeance of their enemies. Biorn hurled the spear which he held in his hand against his son with mad fury. The deadly weapon whizzed past him : Sintram remained standing with his visor raised, he did not move one limb in his defence, when he said : " Father, do what you will ; but I join not in your godless warfare."

Biorn of the Fiery Eyes laughed scornfully : " It seems I am always to have a spy over me here ; my son succeeds to the dainty French knight ! " But nevertheless he came to himself, accepted Sintram's mediation, made amends for the injuries he had done, and returned gloomily to his castle. Sintram went back to the Rocks of the Moon.

Such occurrences were frequent after that time. It went so far that Sintram came to be looked upon as the protector of all those whom his father pursued with relentless fury ;

but nevertheless sometimes his own wildness would carry the young knight away to accompany his fierce father in his fearful deeds. Then Biorn used to laugh with horrible pleasure, and to say: "See there, my son, how the flames we have lighted blaze up from the villages, as the blood spouts up from the wounds our swords have made! It is plain to me, however much thou mayst pretend to the contrary, that thou art, and wilt ever remain, my true and beloved heir!"

After thus fearfully erring, Sintram could find no comfort but in hastening to the chaplain of Drontheim, and confessing to him his misery and his sins. The chaplain would freely absolve him, after due penance and repentance, and again raise up the broken-hearted youth; but would often say: "Oh, how nearly hadst thou reached thy last trial, and gained the victory, and looked on Verena's countenance, and atoned for all! Now thou hast thrown thyself back for years. Think, my son, on the shortness of man's life; if thou art always falling back anew, how wilt thou ever gain the summit on this side the grave?"

Years came and went, and Biorn's hair was white as snow, and the youth Sintram had reached the middle age. Old Rolf was now scarcely able to leave the stone fortress; and sometimes he said: "I feel it a burden that my life should yet be prolonged; but also there is much comfort in it, for I still think the good God has in store for me here below some great happiness; and it must be something in which you are concerned, my beloved Sir Sintram, for what else in the whole world could rejoice me?"

But all remained as it was, and Sintram's fearful dreams at Christmas-time each year rather increased than diminished in horror. Again the holy season was drawing near, and the mind of the sorely afflicted knight was more troubled than ever before. Sometimes, if he had been reckoning up the nights till it should come, a cold sweat

would stand on his forehead, while he said, "Mark my words, dear old foster-father, this time something most awfully decisive lies before me."

One evening he felt an overwhelming anxiety about his father. It seemed to him that the Prince of Darkness was going up to Biorn's castle; and in vain did Rolf remind him that the snow was lying deep in the valleys, in vain did he suggest that the knight might be overtaken by his frightful dreams in the lonely mountains during the night-time. "Nothing can be worse to me than remaining here would be," replied Sintram.

He took his horse from the stable and rode forth in the gathering darkness. The noble steed slipped and stumbled and fell in the trackless way, but his rider always raised him up, and urged him only more swiftly and eagerly towards the object which he longed and yet dreaded to reach. Nevertheless he might never have arrived at it had not his faithful hound Skovmark kept with him. The dog sought out the lost track for his beloved master, and invited him into it with joyous barkings, and warned him by his howls against precipices and treacherous ice under the snow. Thus they arrived about midnight at Biorn's castle. The windows of the hall shone opposite to them with a brilliant light, as though some great feast were kept there, and confused sounds, as of singing, met their ears. Sintram gave his horse hastily to some retainers in the court-yard, and ran up the steps, whilst Skovmark stayed by the well-known horse.

A good esquire came towards Sintram within the castle, and said, "God be praised, my dear master, that you are come; for surely nothing good is going on above. But take heed to yourself also, and be not deluded. Your father has a guest with him,—and, as I think,—a hateful one."

Sintram shuddered as he threw open the doors. A little

man in the dress of a miner was sitting with his back towards him. The armour had been for some time past again ranged round the stone table, so that only two places were left empty. The seat opposite the door had been taken by Biorn of the Fiery Eyes ; and the dazzling light of the torches fell upon his features with so red a flare, that he perfectly enacted that fearful surname.

"Father, whom have you here with you?" cried Sintram ; and his suspicions rose to certainty as the miner turned round, and the detestable face of the little Master grinned from under his dark hood.

"Yes, just see, my fair son," said the wild Biorn ; "thou hast not been here for a long while,—and so to-night this jolly comrade has paid me a visit, and thy place has been taken. But throw one of the suits of armour out of the way, and put a seat for thyself instead of it,—and come and drink with us, and be merry."

"Yes, do so, Sir Sintram," said the little Master, with a laugh. "Nothing worse could come of it than that the broken pieces of armour might clatter somewhat strangely together, or at most that the disturbed spirit of him to whom the suit belonged might look over your shoulder ; but he would not drink up any of our wine—ghosts have nothing to do with that. So now fall to!"

Biorn joined in the laughter of the hideous stranger with wild mirth ; and while Sintram was mustering up his whole strength not to lose his senses at so terrible words, and was fixing a calm, steady look on the little Master's face, the old man cried out, "Why dost thou look at him so? Does it seem as though thou sawest thyself in a mirror? Now that you are together, I do not see it so much ; but a while ago I thought that you were like enough to each other to be mistaken."

"God forbid!" said Sintram, walking up close to the fearful apparition : "I command thee, detestable stranger,

to depart from this castle, in right of my authority as my father's heir,—as a consecrated knight and as a spirit!"

Biorn seemed as if he wished to oppose himself to this command with all his savage might. The little Master muttered to himself, "Thou art not by any means the master in this house, pious knight; thou hast never lighted a fire on this hearth." Then Sintram drew the sword which Gabrielle had given him, held the cross of the hilt before the eyes of his evil guest, and said, calmly, but with a powerful voice, "Worship or fly!" And he fled, the frightful stranger,—he fled with such lightning speed, that it could scarcely be seen whether he had sprung through the window or the door. But in going he overthrew some of the armour, the tapers went out, and it seemed that the pale blue flame which lighted up the whole in a marvellous manner gave a fulfilment to the little Master's former words: and that the spirits of those to whom the armour had belonged were leaning over the table, grinning fearfully.

Both the father and the son were filled with horror; but each chose an opposite way to save himself. Biorn wished to have his hateful guest back again; and the power of his will was seen when the little Master's step resounded anew on the stairs, and his brown shrivelled hand shook the lock of the door. On the other hand, Sintram ceased not to say within himself, "We are lost, if he come back! We are lost to all eternity, if he come back!" And he fell on his knees, and prayed fervently from his troubled heart to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Then the little Master left the door, and again Biorn willed him to return, and again Sintram's prayers drove him away. So went on this strife of wills throughout the long night; and howling whirlwinds raged the while around the castle, till all the household thought the end of the world was come.

At length the dawn of morning appeared through the windows of the hall,—the fury of the storm was lulled,—Biorn sank back powerless in slumber on his seat,—peace and hope came to the inmates of the castle,—and Sintram, pale and exhausted, went out to breathe the dewy air of the mild winter's morning before the castle-gates.

XXVI
CHAPTER

THE faithful Skovmark followed his master, caressing him ; and when Sintram fell asleep on a stone seat in the wall, he lay at his feet, keeping watchful guard. Suddenly he pricked up his ears, looked round with delight, and bounded joyfully down the mountain. Just afterwards the chaplain of Drontheim appeared amongst the rocks, and the good beast went up to him as if to greet him, and then again ran back to the knight to announce the welcome visitor.

Sintram opened his eyes, as a child whose Christmas-gifts have been placed at his bedside. For the chaplain smiled at him as he had never yet seen him smile. There

was in it a token of victory and blessing, or at least of the near approach of both. "Thou hast done much yesterday, very much," said the holy priest; and his hands were joined, and his eyes full of bright tears. "I praise God for thee, my noble light. Verena knows all, and she too praises God for thee. I do indeed now dare hope that the time will soon come when thou mayst appear before her. But Sintram, Sir Sintram, there is need of haste; for the old man above requires speedy air, and thou hast still a heavy —as I hope the last—yet a most heavy trial to undergo for his sake. Arm thyself, my knight, arm thyself even with bodily weapons. In truth, this time only spiritual armour is needed, but it always befits a knight, as well as a monk, to wear in decisive moments the entire solemn garb of his station. If it so please thee, we will go directly to Drontheim together. Thou must return thence to-night. Such is a part of the hidden decree, which has been dimly unfolded to Verena's foresight. Here there is yet much that is wild and distracting, and thou hast great need to-day of calm preparation."

With humble joy Sintram bowed his assent, and called for his horse and for a suit of armour. "Only," added he, "let not any of that armour be brought which was last night overthrown in the hall!"

His orders were quickly obeyed. The arms which were fetched, adorned with fine engraved work, the simple helmet, formed rather like that of an esquire than a knight, the lance of almost gigantic size, which belonged to the suit—on all these the chaplain gazed in deep thought and with melancholy emotion. At last, when Sintram, with the help of his esquires, was well-nigh equipped, the holy priest spoke:

"Wonderful providence of God! See, dear Sintram, this armour and this spear were formerly those of Sir Weigand the Slender, and with them he did many mighty

deeds. When he was tended by your mother in the castle, and when even your father still showed himself kind towards him, he asked, as a favour, that his armour and his lance should be allowed to hang in Biorn's armoury—Weigand himself, as you well know, intended to build a cloister and to live there as a monk—and he put his old esquire's helmet with it, instead of another, because he was yet wearing that one when he first saw the fair Verena's angelic face. How wondrously does it now come to pass, that these very arms, which have so long been laid aside, should be brought to you for the decisive hour of your life! To me, as far as my short-sighted human wisdom can tell,—to me it seems truly a very solemn token, but one full of high and glorious promise."

Sintram stood now in complete array, composed and stately, and, from his tall slender figure, might have been taken for a youth, had not the deep lines of care which furrowed his countenance shown him to be advanced in years.

"Who has placed boughs on the head of my war-horse?" asked Sintram of the esquires, with displeasure. "I am not a conqueror, nor a wedding-guest. And besides, there are no boughs now but those red and yellow crackling oak-leaves, dull and dead like the season itself."

"Sir Knight, I know not myself," answered an esquire; "but it seemed to me that it must be so."

"Let it be," said the chaplain. "I feel that this also comes as a token full of meaning from the right source."

Then the knight threw himself into his saddle; the priest went beside him; and they both rode slowly and silently towards Drontheim. The faithful dog followed his master. When the lofty castle of Drontheim appeared in sight, a gentle smile spread itself over Sintram's countenance, like sunshine over a wintry valley.

"God has done great things for me," said he. "I once

rushed from here, a fearfully wild boy; I now come back a penitent man. I trust that it will yet go well with my poor troubled life."

The chaplain assented kindly, and soon afterwards the travellers passed under the echoing vaulted gateway into the castle-yard. At a sign from the priest, the retainers approached with respectful haste, and took charge of the horse; then he and Sintram went through long winding passages and up many steps to the remote chamber which the chaplain had chosen for himself; far away from the noise of men, and near to the clouds and the stars. There the two passed a quiet day in devout prayer, and earnest reading of Holy Scripture.

When the evening began to close in, the chaplain arose and said: "And now, my knight, get ready thy horse, and mount and ride back again to thy father's castle. A toilsome way lies before thee, and I dare not go with you. But I can and will call upon the Lord for you all through the long fearful night. O beloved instrument of the Most High, thou wilt yet not be lost!"

Thrilling with strange forebodings, but nevertheless strong and vigorous in spirit, Sintram did according to the holy man's desire. The sun set as the knight approached a long valley, strangely shut in by rocks, through which lay the road to his father's castle.

XXVII
CHAPTER

Sintram and his companions.

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BEFORE entering the rocky pass, the knight, with a prayer and thanksgiving, looked back once more at the castle of Drontheim. There it was, so vast and quiet and peaceful; the bright windows of the chaplain's high chamber yet lighted up by the last gleam of the sun, which had already disappeared. In front of Sintram was the gloomy valley, as if his grave. Then there came towards him some one riding on a small horse; and Skovmark, who had gone up to the stranger as if to find out who he was, now ran back with his tail between his legs and his ears put back, howling and whining, and crept, terrified, under his master's war-horse. But even the noble steed appeared to have forgotten his once so fearless and war-

like ardour. He trembled violently, and when the knight would have turned him towards the stranger, he reared and snorted and plunged, and began to throw himself backwards. It was only with difficulty that Sintram's strength and horsemanship got the better of him ; and he was all white with foam when Sintram came up to the unknown traveller.

"You have cowardly beasts with you," said the latter, in a low, smothered voice.

Sintram was unable, in the ever-increasing darkness, rightly to distinguish what kind of being he saw before him ; only a very pallid face, which at first he had thought was covered with freshly fallen snow, met his eyes from amidst the long hanging garments. It seemed that the stranger carried a small box wrapped up ; his little horse, as if wearied out, bent his head down towards the ground, whereby a bell, which hung from the wretched torn bridle under his neck, was made to give a strange sound. After a short silence, Sintram replied : "Noble steeds avoid those of a worse race, because they are ashamed of them ; and the boldest dogs are attacked by a secret terror at sight of forms to which they are not accustomed. I have no cowardly beasts with me."

"Good, sir knight ; then ride with me through the valley."

"I am going through the valley, but I want no companions."

"But perhaps I want one. Do you not see that I am unarmed? And at this season, at this hour, there are frightful, unearthly beasts about."

Just then, as though to confirm the awful words of the stranger, a thing swung itself down from one of the nearest trees, covered with hoar-frost,—no one could say if it were a snake or a lizard,—it curled and twisted itself, and appeared about to slide down upon the knight or his companion. Sin-

tram levelled his spear, and pierced the creature through. But, with the most hideous contortions, it fixed itself firmly on the spear-head; and in vain did the knight endeavour to rub it off against the rocks or the trees. Then he let his spear rest upon his right shoulder, with the point behind him, so that the horrible beast no longer met his sight; and he said, with good courage, to the stranger, "It does seem, indeed, that I could help you, and I am not forbidden to have an unknown stranger in my company; so let us push on bravely into the valley!"

"Help!" so resounded the solemn answer; "not help. I perhaps may help thee. But God have mercy upon thee if the time should ever come when I could no longer help thee. Then thou wouldst be lost, and I should become very frightful to thee. But we will go through the valley —I have thy knightly word for it. Come!"

They rode forward; Sintram's horse still showing signs of fear, the faithful dog still whining; but both obedient to their master's will. The knight was calm and steadfast. The snow had slipped down from the smooth rocks, and by the light of the rising moon could be seen various strange twisted shapes on their sides, some looking like snakes, and some like human faces; but they were only formed by the veins in the rock and the half-bare roots of trees, which had planted themselves in that desert place with capricious firmness. High above, and at a great distance, the castle of Drontheim, as if to take leave, appeared again through an opening in the rocks. The knight then looked keenly at his companion, and he almost felt as if Weigand the Slender were riding beside him.

"In God's name," cried he, "art thou not the shade of that departed knight who suffered and died for Verena?"

"I have not suffered, I have not died; but ye suffer, and ye die, poor mortals!" murmured the stranger. "I am not

Weigand. I am that other, who was so like him, and whom thou hast also met before now in the wood."

Sintram strove to free himself from the terror which came over him at these words. He looked at his horse; it appeared to him entirely altered. The dry, many-coloured oak-leaves on its head were waving like the flames around a sacrifice, in the uncertain moonlight. He looked down again, to see after his faithful Skovmark. Fear had likewise most wondrously changed him. On the ground in the middle of the road were lying dead men's bones, and hideous lizards were crawling about; and, in defiance of the wintry season, poisonous mushrooms were growing up all around.

"Can this be still my horse on which I am riding?" said the knight to himself, in a low voice; "and can that trembling beast which runs at my side be my dog?"

Then some one called after him, in a yelling voice, "Stop! stop! Take me also with you!"

Looking round, Sintram perceived a small, frightful figure with horns, and a face partly like a wild boar and partly like a bear, walking along on its hind-legs, which were those of a horse; and in its hand was a strange, hideous weapon, shaped like a hook or a sickle. It was the being who had been wont to trouble him in his dreams; and, alas! it was also the wretched little Master himself, who, laughing wildly, stretched out a long claw towards the knight.

The bewildered Sintram murmured, "I must have fallen asleep; and now my dreams are coming over me!"

"Thou art awake," replied the rider of the little horse, "but thou knowest me also in thy dreams. For, behold! I am Death." And his garments fell from him, and there appeared a mouldering skeleton, its ghastly head crowned with serpents; that which he had kept hidden under his mantle was an hour-glass with the sand almost run out.

Death held it towards the knight in his fleshless hand. The bell at the neck of the little horse gave forth a solemn sound. It was a passing bell.

"Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit!" prayed Sintram; and full of earnest devotion he rode after Death, who beckoned him on.

"He has thee not yet! He has thee not yet!" screamed the fearful fiend. "Give thyself up to me rather. In one instant,—for swift are thy thoughts, swift is my might,—in one instant thou shalt be in Normandy. Helen yet blooms in beauty as when she departed hence, and this very night she would be thine." And once again he began his unholy praises of Gabrielle's loveliness, and Sintram's heart glowed like wild-fire in his weak breast.

Death said nothing more, but raised the hour-glass in his right hand yet higher and higher; and as the sand now ran out more quickly, a soft light streamed from the glass over Sintram's countenance, and then it seemed to him as if eternity in all its calm majesty were rising before him, and a world of confusion dragging him back with a deadly grasp.

"I command thee, wild form that followest me," cried he, "I command thee, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to cease from thy seducing words, and to call thyself by that name by which thou art recorded in Holy Writ!"

A name, more fearful than a thunderclap, burst despairingly from the lips of the Tempter, and he disappeared.

"He will return no more," said Death, in a kindly tone.

"And now I am become wholly thine, my stern companion?"

"Not yet, my Sintram. I shall not come to thee till many, many years are past. But thou must not forget me the while."

"I will keep the thought of thee steadily before my soul,

thou fearful yet wholesome monitor, thou awful yet loving guide!"

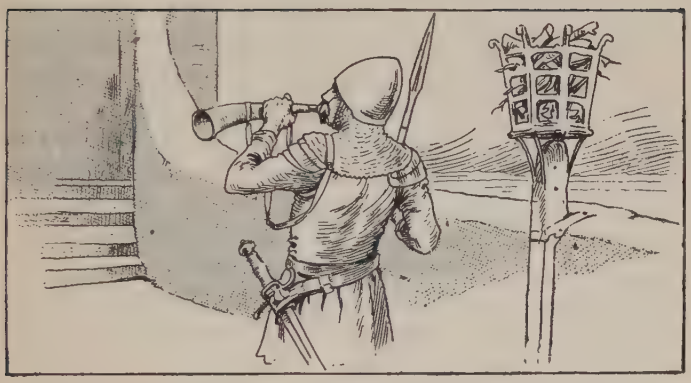
"Oh! I can truly appear very gentle."

And so it proved indeed. His form became more softly defined in the increasing gleam of light which shone from the hour-glass; the features, which had been awful in their sternness, wore a gentle smile; the crown of serpents became a bright palm-wreath; instead of the horse appeared a white misty cloud in the moonlight; and the bell gave forth sounds as of sweet lullabies. Sintram thought he could hear these words amidst them:

"The world and Satan are o'ercome,
Before thee gleams eternal light,
Warrior, who hast won the strife:
Save from darkest shades of night
Him before whose aged eyes
All my terrors soon shall rise."

The knight well knew that his father was meant; and he urged on his noble steed, which now obeyed his master willingly and gladly, and the faithful dog also again ran beside him fearlessly. Death had disappeared; but in front of Sintram there floated a bright morning cloud, which continued visible after the sun had risen clear and warm in the bright winter sky.

XXVIII
CHAPTER



"HE is dead! the horrors of that fearful stormy night have killed him!" Thus said, about this time, some of Biorn's retainers, who had not been able to bring him back to his senses since the morning of the day before: they had made a couch of wolf and bear skins for him in the great hall, in the midst of the armour which still lay scattered around. One of the esquires said with a low sigh: "The Lord have mercy on his poor wild soul!"

Just then the warder blew his horn from his tower, and a trooper came into the room with a look of surprise. "A knight is coming hither," said he; "a wonderful knight. I could have taken him for our Lord Sintram—but a bright, bright morning cloud floats so close before him, and throws over him such a clear light, that one could

fancy red flowers were showered down upon him. Besides, his horse has a wreath of red leaves on his head, which was never a custom of the son of our dead lord."

"Just such a one," replied another, "I wove for him yesterday. He was not pleased with it at first, but afterwards he let it remain."

"But why didst thou that?"

"It seemed to me as if I heard a voice singing again and again in my ear: 'Victory! victory! the noblest victory! The knight rides forth to victory!' And then I saw a branch of our oldest oak-tree stretched towards me, which had kept on almost all its red and yellow leaves in spite of the snow. So I did according to what I had heard sung; and I plucked some of the leaves, and wove a triumphal wreath for the noble war-horse. At the same time Skovmark,—you know that the faithful beast had always a great dislike to Biorn, and therefore had gone to the stable with the horse,—Skovmark jumped upon me, fawning, and seemed pleased, as if he wanted to thank me for my work; and such noble animals understand well about good prognostics."

They heard the sound of Sintram's spurs on the stone steps, and Skovmark's joyous bark. At that instant the supposed corpse of old Biorn sat up, looked around with rolling, staring eyes, and asked of the terrified retainers in a hollow voice, "Who comes there, ye people? who comes there? I know it is my son. But who comes with him? The answer to that bears the sword of decision in its mouth. For see, good people, Gotthard and Rudlieb have prayed much for me; yet if the little Master come with him, I am lost in spite of them."

"Thou art not lost, my beloved father!" Sintram's kind voice was heard to say, as he softly opened the door, and the bright red morning cloud floated in with him.

Biorn joined his hands, cast a look of thankfulness up

to heaven, and said, smiling, "Yes, praised be God! it is the right companion! It is sweet gentle death!" And then he made a sign to his son to approach, saying, "Come here, my deliverer; come, blessed of the Lord, that I may relate to thee all that has passed within me."

As Sintram now sat close by his father's couch, all who were in the room perceived a remarkable and striking change. For old Biorn, whose whole countenance, and not his eyes alone, had been wont to have a fiery aspect, was now quite pale, almost like white marble; while, on the other hand, the cheeks of the once deadly pale Sintram glowed with a bright bloom like that of early youth. It was caused by the morning cloud which still shone upon him, whose presence in the room was rather felt than seen; but it produced a gentle thrill in every heart.

"See, my son," began the old man, softly and mildly, "I have lain for a long time in a death-like sleep, and have known nothing of what was going on around me; but within,—ah! within, I have known but too much! I thought that my soul would be destroyed by the eternal anguish; and yet again I felt, with much greater horror, that my soul was eternal like that anguish. Beloved son, thy cheeks that glowed so brightly are beginning to grow pale at my words. I refrain from more. But let me relate to you something more cheering. Far, far away, I could see a bright lofty church, where Gotthard and Rudlieb Lenz were kneeling and praying for me. Gotthard had grown very old, and looked almost like one of our mountains covered with snow, on which the sun, in the lovely evening hours, is shining; and Rudlieb was also an elderly man, but very vigorous and very strong; and they both, with all their strength and vigour, were calling upon God to aid me, their enemy. Then I heard a voice like that of an angel, saying, 'His son does the most for him! He must this night wrestle with death

and with the fallen one! His victory will be victory, and his defeat will be defeat, for the old man and himself.' Thereupon I awoke; and I knew that all depended upon whom thou wouldst bring with thee. Thou hast conquered. Next to God, the praise be to thee!"

"Gotthard and Rudlieb have helped much," replied Sintram; "and, beloved father, so have the fervent prayers of the chaplain of Drontheim. I felt, when struggling with temptation and deadly fear, how the heavenly breath of holy men floated round me and aided me."

"I am most willing to believe that, my noble son, and everything thou sayest to me," answered the old man; and at the same moment the chaplain also coming in, Biorn stretched out his hand towards him with a smile of peace and joy. And now all seemed to be surrounded with a bright circle of unity and blessedness. "But see," said old Biorn, "how the faithful Skovmark jumps upon me now, and tries to caress me. It is not long since he used always to howl with terror when he saw me."

"My dear lord," said the chaplain, "there is a spirit dwelling in good beasts, though dreamy and unconscious."

As the day wore on, the stillness in the hall increased. The last hour of the aged knight was drawing near, but he met it calmly and fearlessly. The chaplain and Sintram prayed beside his couch. The retainers knelt devoutly around. At length the dying man said: "Is that the prayer-bell in Verena's cloister?" Sintram's looks said yea; while warm tears fell on the colourless cheeks of his father. A gleam shone in the old man's eyes, the morning cloud stood close over him, and then the gleam, the morning cloud, and life with them, departed from him.

XXIX
CHAPTER

A FEW days afterwards Sintram stood in the parlour of the convent, and waited with a beating heart for his mother to appear. He had seen her for the last time when, a slumbering child, he had been awakened by her warm farewell kisses, and then had fallen asleep again, to wonder in his dreams what his mother had wanted with him, and to seek her in vain the next morning in the castle and in the garden. The chaplain was now at his side, rejoicing in the chastened rapture of the knight, whose fierce spirit had been softened, on whose cheeks a light reflection of that solemn morning cloud yet lingered.

The inner doors opened. In her white veil, stately and noble, the Lady Verena came forward, and with a heavenly

smile she beckoned her son to approach the grating. There could be no thought here of any passionate outbreak, whether of sorrow or of joy.[1] The holy peace which had its abode within these walls would have found its way to a heart less tried and less purified than that which beat in Sintram's bosom. Shedding some placid tears, the son knelt before his mother, kissed her flowing garments through the grating, and felt as if in paradise, where every wish and every care is hushed. "Beloved mother," said he, "let me become a holy man, as thou art a holy woman. Then I will betake myself to the cloister yonder; and perhaps I might one day be deemed worthy to be thy confessor, if illness or the weakness of old age should keep the good chaplain within the castle of Drontheim."

"That would be a sweet, quietly happy life, my good child," replied the Lady Verena; "but such is not thy vocation. Thou must remain a bold, powerful knight, and thou must spend the long life, which is almost always granted to us children of the North, in succouring the weak, in keeping down the lawless, and in yet another more bright and honourable employment which I hitherto rather honour than know."

"God's will be done!" said the knight, and he rose up full of self-devotion and firmness.

"That is my good son," said the Lady Verena. "Ah! how many sweet calm joys spring up for us! See, already is our longing desire of meeting again satisfied, and thou wilt never more be so entirely estranged from me. Every week on this day thou wilt come back to me, and thou wilt relate what glorious deeds thou hast done, and take back with thee my advice and my blessing."

[1] "In whose sweet presence sorrow dares not lower
Nor expectation rise
Too high for earth."—*Christian Year.*

"Am I not once more a good and happy child!" cried Sintram joyously; "only that the merciful God has given me in addition the strength of a man in body and spirit. Oh, how blessed is that son to whom it is allowed to gladden his mother's heart with the blossoms and the fruit of his life!"

Thus he left the quiet cloister's shade, joyful in spirit and richly laden with blessings, to enter on his noble career. He was not content with going about wherever there might be a rightful cause to defend or evil to avert; the gates of the now hospitable castle stood always open also to receive and shelter every stranger; and old Rolf, who was almost grown young again at the sight of his lord's excellence, was established as seneschal. The winter of Sintram's life set in bright and glorious, and it was only at times that he would sigh within himself and say, "Ah, Montfaucon! ah, Gabrielle! if I could dare to hope that you have quite forgiven me!"

XXX

CHAPTER

THE spring had come in its brightness to the northern lands, when one morning Sintram turned his horse homewards, after a successful encounter with one of the most formidable disturbers of the peace of his neighbourhood. His horsemen rode after him, singing as they went. As they drew near the castle, they heard the sound of joyous notes wound on the horn. "Some welcome visitor must have arrived," said the knight; and he spurred his horse to a quicker pace over the dewy meadow. While still at some distance, they descried old Rolf, busily engaged in preparing a table for the morning meal, under the trees in front of the castle-gates. From all the turrets and battlements floated banners and flags in the fresh

morning breeze: esquires were running to and fro in their gayest apparel. As soon as the good Rolf saw his master, he clapped his hands joyfully over his grey head, and hastened into the castle. Immediately the wide gates were thrown open; and Sintram, as he entered, was met by Rolf, whose eyes were filled with tears of joy while he pointed towards three noble forms that were following him.

Two men of high stature—one in extreme old age, the other grey-headed, and both remarkably alike—were leading between them a fair young boy, in a page's dress of blue velvet, richly embroidered with gold. The two old men wore the dark velvet dress of German burghers, and had massive gold chains and large shining medals hanging round their necks.

Sintram had never before seen his honoured guests, and yet he felt as if they were well known and valued friends. The very aged man reminded him of his dying father's words about the snow-covered mountains lighted up by the evening sun; and then he remembered, he could scarcely tell how, that he had heard Folko say that one of the highest mountains of that sort in his southern land was called the St. Gotthard. And at the same time, he knew that the old but yet vigorous man on the other side was named Rudlieb. But the boy who stood between them; ah! Sintram's humility dared scarcely form a hope as to who he might be, however much his features, so noble and soft, called up two highly honoured images before his mind.

Then the aged Gotthard Lenz, the king of old men, advanced with a solemn step, and said—"This is the noble boy Engeltram of Montfaucon, the only son of the great baron; and his father and mother send him to you, Sir Sintram, knowing well your holy and glorious knightly career, that you may bring him up to all the honourable and valiant deeds of this northern land, and may make of him a Christian knight, like yourself."

Sintram threw himself from his horse. Engeltram of Montfaucon held the stirrup gracefully for him, checking the retainers, who pressed forward, with these words: "I am the noblest born esquire of this knight, and the service nearest to his person belongs to me."

Sintram knelt in silent prayer on the turf; then lifting up in his arms, towards the rising sun, the image of Folko and Gabrielle, he cried, "With the help of God, my Engeltram, thou wilt become glorious as that sun, and thy course will be like his!"

And old Rolf exclaimed, as he wept for joy, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

Gotthard Lenz and Rudlieb were pressed to Sintram's heart; the chaplain of Drontheim, who just then came from Verena's cloister to bring a joyful greeting to her brave son, stretched out his hands to bless them all.

UNDINE

UNDINE ! thou fair and lovely sprite.
Since first from out an ancient lay
I saw gleam forth thy fitful light,
How hast thou sung my cares away !

How hast thou nestled next my heart,
And gently offered to impart
Thy sorrows to my listening ear,
Like a half-shy, half-trusting child,
The while my lute, in wood-notes wild,
Thine accents echoed far and near !

Then many a youth I won to muse
With love on thy mysterious ways,
With many a fair one to peruse
The legend of thy wondrous days.

And now both dame and youth would fain
List to my tale yet once again ;
Nay, sweet Undine, be not afraid !
Enter their halls with footsteps light,
Greet courteously each noble knight,
But fondly every German maid.

And should they ask concerning me,
Oh, say, " He is a cavalier,
Who truly serves and valiantly,
In tourney and festivity,
With lute and sword, each lady fair !"

CHAPTER I

ON a beautiful evening, many hundred years ago, a worthy old fisherman sat mending his nets. The spot where he dwelt was exceedingly picturesque. The green turf on which he had built his cottage ran far out into a great lake; and this slip of verdure appeared to stretch into it as much through love of its clear waters as the lake, moved by a like impulse, strove to fold the meadow, with its waving grass and flowers, and the cooling shade of the trees, in its embrace of love. They seemed to be drawn toward each other, and the one to be visiting the other as a guest.

With respect to human beings, indeed, in this pleasant spot, excepting the fisherman and his family, there were few, or rather none, to be met with. For as in the background of the scene, toward the west and north-west, lay a forest of extraordinary wildness, which, owing to its sunless gloom and almost impassable recesses, as well as to fear of the strange creatures and visionary illusions to be encountered in it, most people avoided entering, unless in cases of extreme necessity. The pious old fisherman, however, many times passed through it without harm, when he carried the fine fish which he caught by his beautiful strip of land to a great city lying only a short distance beyond the forest.

Now the reason he was able to go through this wood with so much ease may have been chiefly this, because he entertained scarcely any thoughts but such as were of a religious nature ; and besides, every time he crossed the evil-reported shades, he used to sing some holy song with a clear voice and from a sincere heart.

Well, while he sat by his nets this evening, neither fearing nor devising evil, a sudden terror seized him, as he heard a rushing in the darkness of the wood, that resembled the tramping of a mounted steed, and the noise continued every instant drawing nearer and nearer to his little territory.

What he had fancied, when abroad in many a stormy night, respecting the mysteries of the forest, now flashed through his mind in a moment, especially the figure of a man of gigantic stature and snow-white appearance, who kept nodding his head in a portentous manner. And when he raised his eyes towards the wood, the form came before him in perfect distinctness, as he saw the nodding man burst forth from the mazy web-work of leaves and branches. But he immediately felt emboldened, when he reflected that nothing to give him alarm had ever befallen him even in

A worthy old fisherman sat mending his nets.—*p.* 157.

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the forest; and moreover, that on this open neck of land the evil spirit, it was likely, would be still less daring in the exercise of his power. At the same time he prayed aloud with the most earnest sincerity of devotion, repeating a passage of the Bible. This inspired him with fresh courage, and soon perceiving the illusion, and the strange mistake into which his imagination had betrayed him, he could with difficulty refrain from laughing. The white nodding figure he had seen became transformed, in the twinkling of an eye, to what in reality it was, a small brook, long and familiarly known to him, which ran foaming from the forest, and discharged itself into the lake.

But what had caused the startling sound was a knight arrayed in sumptuous apparel, who from under the shadows of the trees came riding toward the cottage. His doublet was violet embroidered with gold, and his scarlet cloak hung gracefully over it; on his cap of burnished gold waved red and violet-coloured plumes; and in his golden shoulder-belt flashed a sword, richly ornamented, and extremely beautiful. The white barb that bore the knight was more slenderly built than war-horses usually are, and he touched the turf with a step so light and elastic that the green and flowery carpet seemed hardly to receive the slightest injury from his tread. The old fisherman, notwithstanding, did not feel perfectly secure in his mind, although he was forced to believe that no evil could be feared from an appearance so pleasing, and therefore, as good manners dictated, he took off his hat on the knight's coming near, and quietly remained by the side of his nets.

When the stranger stopped, and asked whether he, with his horse, could have shelter and entertainment there for the night, the fisherman returned answer: "As to your horse, fair sir, I have no better stable for him than this shady meadow, and no better provender than the grass that is growing here. But with respect to yourself, you

shall be welcome to our humble cottage, and to the best supper and lodging we are able to give you."

The knight was well contented with this reception; and alighting from his horse, which his host assisted him to relieve from saddle and bridle, he let him hasten away to the fresh pasture, and thus spoke: "Even had I found you less hospitable and kindly disposed, my worthy old friend, you would still, I suspect, hardly have got rid of me to-day; for here, I perceive, a broad lake lies before us, and as to riding back into that wood of wonders, with the shades of evening deepening around me, may Heaven in its grace preserve me from the thought."

"Pray, not a word of the wood, or of returning into it!" said the fisherman, and took his guest into the cottage.

There beside the hearth, from which a frugal fire was diffusing its light through the clean twilight room, sat the fisherman's aged wife in a great chair. At the entrance of their noble guest, she rose and gave him a courteous welcome, but sat down again in her seat of honour, not making the slightest offer of it to the stranger. Upon this the fisherman said with a smile:

"You must not be offended with her, young gentleman, because she has not given up to you the best chair in the house; it is a custom among poor people to look upon this as the privilege of the aged."

"Why, husband!" cried the old lady, with a quiet smile, "where can your wits be wandering? Our guest, to say the least of him, must belong to a Christian country; and how is it possible, then, that so well-bred a young man as he appears to be could dream of driving old people from their chairs? Take a seat, my young master," continued she, turning to the knight; "there is still quite a snug little chair on the other side of the room there, only be careful not to shove it about too roughly, for one of its legs, I fear, is none of the firmest."

The knight brought up the seat as carefully as she could desire, sat down upon it good-humouredly, and it seemed to him almost as if he must be somehow related to this little household, and have just returned home from abroad.

These three worthy people now began to converse in the most friendly and familiar manner. In relation to the forest, indeed, concerning which the knight occasionally made some inquiries, the old man chose to know and say but little ; he was of opinion that slightly touching upon it at this hour of twilight was most suitable and safe ; but of the cares and comforts of their home, and their business abroad, the aged couple spoke more freely, and listened also with eager curiosity as the knight recounted to them his travels, and how he had a castle near one of the sources of the Danube, and that his name was Sir Huldbrand of Ringstetten.

Already had the stranger, while they were in the midst of their talk, heard at times a splash against the little low window, as if some one were dashing water against it. The old man, every time he heard the noise, knit his brows with vexation ; but at last, when the whole sweep of a shower came pouring like a torrent against the panes, and bubbling through the decayed frame into the room, he started up indignant, rushed to the window, and cried with a threatening voice—

" Undine ! will you never leave off these fooleries ?—not even to-day, when we have a stranger knight with us in the cottage ? "

All without now became still, only a low laugh was just audible, and the fisherman said, as he came back to his seat, " You will have the goodness, my honoured guest, to pardon this freak, and it may be a multitude more ; but she has no thought of evil or of any harm. This mischievous Undine, to confess the truth, is our adopted daughter, and

she stoutly refuses to give over this frolicsome childishness of hers, although she has already entered her eighteenth year. But in spite of this, as I said before, she is at heart one of the very best children in the world."

"*You* may say so," broke in the old lady, shaking her head; "you can give a better account of her than I can. When you return home from fishing, or from selling your fish in the city, you may think her frolics very delightful, but to have her dancing about you the whole day long, and never from morning to night to hear her speak one word of sense; and then as she grows older, instead of having any help from her in the family, to find her a continual cause of anxiety, lest her wild humours should completely ruin us, that is quite another thing, and enough at last to weary out the patience even of a saint."

"Well, well," replied the master of the house with a smile, "you have your trials with Undine, and I have mine with the lake. The lake often beats down my dams, and breaks the meshes of my nets, but for all that I have a strong affection for it, and so have you, in spite of your mighty crosses and vexations, for our graceful little child. Is it not true?"

"One cannot be very angry with her," answered the old lady, as she gave her husband an approving smile.

That instant the door flew open, and a fair girl, of wondrous beauty, sprang laughing in, and said, "You have only been making a mock of me, father; for where now is the guest you mentioned?"

The same moment, however, she perceived the knight also, and continued standing before the young man in fixed astonishment. Huldbrand was charmed with her graceful figure, and viewed her lovely features with the more intense interest, as he imagined it was only her surprise that allowed him the opportunity, and that she would soon turn away from his gaze with increased bashfulness. But the

event was the very reverse of what he expected ; for, after looking at him for a long while, she became more confident, moved nearer, knelt down before him, and while she played with a gold medal which he wore attached to a rich chain on his breast, exclaimed,

"Why, you beautiful, you kind guest! how have you reached our poor cottage at last? Have you been obliged for years and years to wander about the world before you could catch one glimpse of our nook? Do you come out of that wild forest, my beautiful knight?"

The old woman was so prompt in her reproof as to allow him no time to answer. She commanded the maiden to rise, show better manners, and go to her work. But Undine, without making any reply, drew a little footstool near Huldbrand's chair, sat down upon it with her netting, and said in a gentle tone—

"I will work here."

The old man did as parents are apt to do with children to whom they have been over-indulgent. He affected to observe nothing of Undine's strange behaviour, and was beginning to talk about something else. But this the maiden did not permit him to do. She broke in upon him, "I have asked our kind guest from whence he has come among us, and he has not yet answered me."

"I come out of the forest, you lovely little vision," Huldbrand returned ; and she spoke again :

"You must also tell me how you came to enter that forest, so feared and shunned, and the marvellous adventures you met with in it ; for there is no escaping without something of this kind."

Huldbrand felt a slight shudder on remembering what he had witnessed, and looked involuntarily toward the window, for it seemed to him that one of the strange shapes which had come upon him in the forest must be there grinning in through the glass ; but he discerned nothing

except the deep darkness of night, which had now enveloped the whole prospect. Upon this he became more collected, and was just on the point of beginning his account, when the old man thus interrupted him :

"Not so, sir knight ; this is by no means a fit hour for such relations."

But Undine, in a state of high excitement, sprang up from her little stool and cried, placing herself directly before the fisherman : "He shall *not* tell his story, father? he shall not? But it is my will :—he shall !—stop him who may !"

Thus speaking, she stamped her little foot vehemently on the floor, but all with an air of such comic and good-humoured simplicity, that Huldbrand now found it quite as hard to withdraw his gaze from her wild emotion as he had before from her gentleness and beauty. The old man, on the contrary, burst out in unrestrained displeasure. He severely reproved Undine for her disobedience and her unbecoming carriage towards the stranger, and his good old wife joined him in harping on the same string.

By these rebukes Undine was only excited the more. "If you want to quarrel with me," she cried, "and will not let me hear what I so much desire, then sleep alone in your smoky old hut!" And swift as an arrow she shot from the door, and vanished amid the darkness of the night.

Huldbrand and the fisherman sprang from their seats, and were rushing to stop the angry girl ; but before they could reach the cottage-door, she had disappeared in the stormy darkness without, and no sound, not so much even as that of her light footstep, betrayed the course she had taken. Huldbrand threw a glance of inquiry towards his host ; it almost seemed to him as if the whole of the sweet apparition, which had so suddenly plunged again amid the

night, were no other than a continuation of the wonderful forms that had just played their mad pranks with him in the forest. But the old man muttered between his teeth,

"This is not the first time she has treated us in this manner. Now must our hearts be filled with anxiety, and our eyes find no sleep for the whole night; for who can assure us, in spite of her past escapes, that she will not some time or other come to harm, if she thus continue out in the dark and alone until daylight?"

"Then pray, for God's sake, father, let us follow her," cried Huldbrand anxiously.

"Wherefore should we?" replied the old man. "It would be a sin were I to suffer you, all alone, to search after the foolish girl amid the lonesomeness of night; and my old limbs would fail to carry me to this wild rover, even if I knew to what place she has betaken herself."

"Still we ought at least to call after her, and beg her to return," said Huldbrand; and he began to call in tones of earnest entreaty, "Undine! Undine! come back, come back!"

The old man shook his head, and said, "All your shouting, however loud and long, will be of no avail; you know not as yet, sir knight, how self-willed the little thing is." But still, even hoping against hope, he could not himself cease calling out every minute, amid the gloom of night, "Undine! ah, dear Undine! I beseech you, pray come back—only this once."

It turned out, however, exactly as the fisherman had said. No Undine could they hear or see; and as the old man would on no account consent that Huldbrand should go in quest of the fugitive, they were both obliged at last to return into the cottage. There they found the fire on the hearth almost gone out, and the mistress of the house, who took Undine's flight and danger far less to

heart than her husband, had already gone to rest. The old man blew up the coals, put on dry wood, and by the firelight hunted for a flask of wine, which he brought and set between himself and his guest.

"You, sir knight, as well as I," said he, "are anxious on the silly girl's account; and it would be better, I think, to spend part of the night in chatting and drinking, than keep turning and turning on our rush-mats, and trying in vain to sleep. What is your opinion?"

Huldbrand was well pleased with the plan; the fisherman pressed him to take the empty seat of honour, its late occupant having now left it for her couch; and they relished their beverage and enjoyed their chat as two such good men and true ever ought to do. To be sure, whenever the slightest thing moved before the windows, or at times when even nothing was moving, one of them would look up and exclaim, "Here she comes!" Then would they continue silent a few moments, and afterward, when nothing appeared, would shake their heads, breathe out a sigh, and go on with their talk.

But, as neither could think of anything but Undine, the best plan they could devise was, that the old fisherman should relate, and the knight should hear, in what manner Undine had come to the cottage. So the fisherman began as follows:

"It is now about fifteen years since I one day crossed the wild forest with fish for the city market. My wife had remained at home as she was wont to do; and at this time for a reason of more than common interest, for although we were beginning to feel the advances of age, God had bestowed upon us an infant of wonderful beauty. It was a little girl; and we already began to ask ourselves the question, whether we ought not, for the advantage of the new-comer, to quit our solitude, and, the better to bring up this precious gift of Heaven, to remove to some more

inhabited place. Poor people, to be sure, cannot in these cases do all you may think they ought, sir knight ; but we must all do what we can.

"Well, I went on my way, and this affair would keep running in my head. This slip of land was most dear to me, and I trembled when, amidst the bustle and broils of the city, I thought to myself, 'In a scene of tumult like this, or at least in one not much more quiet, I must soon take up my abode.' But I did not for this murmur against our good God ; on the contrary, I praised Him in silence for the new-born babe. I should also speak an untruth, were I to say that anything befell me, either on my passage through the forest to the city, or on my returning homeward, that gave me more alarm than usual, as at that time I had never seen any appearance there which could terrify or annoy me. The Lord was ever with me in those awful shades."

Thus speaking he took his cap reverently from his bald head, and continued to sit for a considerable time in devout thought. He then covered himself again, and went on with his relation.

"On this side the forest, alas ! it was on this side, that woe burst upon me. My wife came wildly to meet me, clad in mourning apparel, and her eyes streaming with tears. 'Gracious God !' I cried, 'where's our child ? Speak !'

"'With Him on whom you have called, dear husband,' she answered, and we now entered the cottage together, weeping in silence. I looked for the little corpse, almost fearing to find what I was seeking ; and then it was I first learnt how all had happened.

"My wife had taken the little one in her arms, and walked out to the shore of the lake. She there sat down by its very brink ; and while she was playing with the infant, as free from all fear as she was full of delight, it

bent forward on a sudden, as if seeing something very beautiful in the water. My wife saw her laugh, the dear angel, and try to catch the image in her tiny hands; but in a moment—with a motion swifter than sight—she sprang from her mother's arms, and sank in the lake, the watery glass into which she had been gazing. I searched for our lost darling again and again; but it was all in vain; I could nowhere find the least trace of her.

"The same evening we childless parents were sitting together by our cottage hearth. We had no desire to talk, even if our tears would have permitted us. As we thus sat in mournful stillness, gazing into the fire, all at once we heard something without,—a slight rustling at the door. The door flew open, and we saw a little girl, three or four years old, and more beautiful than I can say, standing on the threshold, richly dressed, and smiling upon us. We were struck dumb with astonishment, and I knew not for a time whether the tiny form were a real human being, or a mere mockery of enchantment. But I soon perceived water dripping from her golden hair and rich garments, and that the pretty child had been lying in the water, and stood in immediate need of our help.

"'Wife,' said I, 'no one has been able to save our child for us; but let us do for others what would have made us so blessed could any one have done it for us.'

"We undressed the little thing, put her to bed, and gave her something to drink; at all this she spoke not a word, but only turned her eyes upon us—eyes blue and bright as sea or sky—and continued looking at us with a smile.

"Next morning we had no reason to fear that she had received any other harm than her wetting, and I now asked her about her parents, and how she could have come to us. But the account she gave was both confused and incredible. She must surely have been born far from here, not only because I have been unable for these fifteen years to learn

anything of her birth, but because she then said, and at times continues to say, many things of so very singular a nature, that we neither of us know, after all, whether she may not have dropped among us from the moon; for her talk runs upon golden castles, crystal domes, and Heaven knows what extravagances beside. What, however, she related with most distinctness was this: that while she was once taking a sail with her mother on the great lake, she fell out of the boat into the water; and that when she first recovered her senses, she was here under our trees, where the gay scenes of the shore filled her with delight.

"We now had another care weighing upon our minds, and one that caused us no small perplexity and uneasiness. We of course very soon determined to keep and bring up the child we had found, in place of our own darling that had been drowned; but who could tell us whether she had been baptized or not? She herself could give us no light on the subject. When we asked her the question, she commonly made answer, that she well knew she was created for God's praise and glory, and that she was willing to let us do with her all that might promote His glory and praise.

"My wife and I reasoned in this way: 'If she has not been baptized, there can be no use in putting off the ceremony; and if she has been, it still is better to have too much of a good thing than too little.'

"Taking this view of our difficulty, we now endeavoured to hit upon a good name for the child, since, while she remained without one, we were often at a loss, in our familiar talk, to know what to call her. We at length agreed that Dorothea would be most suitable for her, as I had somewhere heard it said that this name signified a *gift of God*, and surely she had been sent to us by Providence as a gift, to comfort us in our misery. She, on the contrary, would not so much as hear Dorothea men-

tioned; she insisted, that as she had been named Undine by her parents, Undine she ought still to be called. It now occurred to me that this was a heathenish name, to be found in no calendar, and I resolved to ask the advice of a priest in the city. He would not listen to the name of Undine; and yielding to my urgent request, he came with me through the enchanted forest in order to perform the rite of baptism here in my cottage.

The little maid stood before us.

"The little maid stood before us so prettily adorned, and with such an air of gracefulness, that the heart of the priest softened at once in her presence; and she coaxed him so sweetly, and jested with him so merrily, that he at last remembered nothing of his many objections to the name of Undine.

"Thus, then, was she baptized Undine; and during the holy ceremony she behaved with great propriety and gentle-

ness, wild and wayward as at other times she invariably was; for in this my wife was quite right, when she mentioned the anxiety the child has occasioned us. If I should relate to you——"

At this moment the knight interrupted the fisherman, to direct his attention to a deep sound as of a rushing flood, which had caught his ear during the talk of the old man. And now the waters came pouring on with redoubled fury before the cottage-windows. Both sprang to the door. There they saw, by the light of the now risen moon, the brook which issued from the wood rushing wildly over its banks, and whirling onward with it both stones and branches of trees in its rapid course. The storm, as if awakened by the uproar, burst forth from the clouds, whose immense masses of vapour coursed over the moon with the swiftness of thought; the lake roared beneath the wind that swept the foam from its waves; while the trees of this narrow peninsula groaned from root to topmost branch as they bowed and swung above the torrent.

"Undine! in God's name, Undine!" cried the two men in an agony. No answer was returned. And now, regardless of everything else, they hurried from the cottage, one in this direction, the other in that, searching and calling.

II

CHAPTER

THE longer Huldbrand sought Undine beneath the shades of night, and failed to find her, the more anxious and confused he became. The impression that she was a mere phantom of the forest gained a new ascendency over him; indeed, amid the howling of the waves and the tempest, the crashing of the trees, and the entire change of the once so peaceful and beautiful scene, he was tempted to view the whole peninsula, together with the cottage and its inhabitants, as little more than some mockery of his senses. But still he heard afar off the fisherman's anxious

and incessant shouting, "Undine!" and also his aged wife, who was praying and singing psalms.

At length, when he drew near to the brook, which had overflowed its banks, he perceived by the moonlight, that it had taken its wild course directly in front of the haunted forest, so as to change the peninsula into an island.

"Merciful God!" he breathed to himself, "if Undine has ventured a step within that fearful wood, what will become of her? Perhaps it was all owing to her sportive and wayward spirit, because I would give her no account of my adventures there. And now the stream is rolling between us, she may be weeping alone on the other side in the midst of spectral horrors!"

A shuddering groan escaped him; and clambering over some stones and trunks of overthrown pines, in order to step into the impetuous current, he resolved, either by wading or swimming, to seek the wanderer on the further shore. He felt, it is true, all the dread and shrinking awe creeping over him which he had already suffered by daylight among the now tossing and roaring branches of the forest. More than all, a tall man in white, whom he knew but too well, met his view, as he stood grinning and nodding on the grass beyond the water. But even monstrous forms like this only impelled him to cross over toward them, when the thought rushed upon him that Undine might be there alone and in the agony of death.

He had already grasped a strong branch of a pine, and stood supporting himself upon it in the whirling current, against which he could with difficulty keep himself erect; but he advanced deeper in with a courageous spirit. That instant a gentle voice of warning cried near him, "Do not venture, do not venture!—that OLD MAN, the STREAM, is too full of tricks to be trusted!" He knew the soft tones of the voice; and while he stood as it were entranced beneath the shadows which had now duskily veiled the

moon, his head swam with the swelling and rolling of the waves as he saw them momentarily rising above his knee. Still he disdained the thought of giving up his purpose.

"If you are not really there, if you are merely gambolling round me like a mist, may I, too, bid farewell to life, and become a shadow like you, dear, dear Undine!" Thus calling aloud, he again moved deeper into the stream. "Look round you—ah, pray look round you, beautiful young stranger! why rush on death so madly?" cried the voice a second time close by him; and looking on one side he perceived, by the light of the moon, again cloudless, a little island formed by the flood; and crouching upon its flowery turf, beneath the branches of embowering trees, he saw the smiling and lovely Undine.

O how much more gladly than before the young man now plied his sturdy staff! A few steps, and he had crossed the flood that was rushing between himself and the maiden; and he stood near her on the little spot of green-sward in security, protected by the old trees. Undine half rose, and she threw her arms around his neck to draw him gently down upon the soft seat by her side.

"Here you shall tell me your story, my beautiful friend," she breathed in a low whisper; "here the cross old people cannot disturb us; and, besides, our roof of leaves here will make quite as good a shelter as their poor cottage."

"It is heaven itself," cried Huldbrand; and folding her in his arms, he kissed the lovely girl with fervour.

The old fisherman, meantime, had come to the margin of the stream, and he shouted across, "Why, how is this, sir knight! I received you with the welcome which one true-hearted man gives to another; and now you sit there caressing my foster-child in secret, while you suffer me in my anxiety to wander through the night in quest of her."

"Not till this moment did I find her myself, old father," cried the knight across the water.

The smiling and lovely Undine.—*p.* 176.

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"So much the better," said the fisherman; "but now make haste, and bring her over to me upon firm ground."

To this, however, Undine would by no means consent. She declared that she would rather enter the wild forest itself with the beautiful stranger, than return to the cottage where she was so thwarted in her wishes, and from which the knight would soon or late go away. Then, throwing her arms round Huldbrand, she sang the following verse with the warbling sweetness of a bird:

"A rill would leave its misty vale,
And fortunes wild explore;
Weary at length it reached the main,
And sought its vale no more."

The old fisherman wept bitterly at her song, but his emotion seemed to awaken little or no sympathy in her. She kissed and caressed her new friend, who at last said to her: "Undine, if the distress of the old man does not touch your heart, it cannot but move mine. We ought to return to him."

She opened her large blue eyes upon him in amazement, and spoke at last with a slow and doubtful accent, "If you think so, it is well; all is right to me which you think right. But the old man over there must first give me his promise that he will allow you, without objection, to relate what you saw in the wood, and—well, other things will settle themselves."

"Come—only come!" cried the fisherman to her, unable to utter another word. At the same time he stretched his arms wide over the current towards her, and to give her assurance that he would do what she required, nodded his head. This motion caused his white hair to fall strangely over his face, and Huldbrand could not but remember the nodding white man of the forest. Without allowing anything, however, to produce in him the least confusion, the young knight took the beautiful girl in his arms, and bore

her across the narrow channel which the stream had torn away between her little island and the solid shore. The old man fell upon Undine's neck, and found it impossible either to express his joy or to kiss her enough; even the ancient dame came up and embraced the recovered girl most cordially. Every word of censure was carefully avoided; the more so, indeed, as even Undine, forgetting her waywardness, almost overwhelmed her foster-parents with caresses and the prattle of tenderness.

When at length the excess of their joy at recovering their child had subsided, morning had already dawned, shining upon the waters of the lake; the tempest had become hushed, the small birds sung merrily on the moist branches.

As Undine now insisted upon hearing the recital of the knight's promised adventures, the aged couple readily agreed to her wish. Breakfast was brought out beneath the trees which stood behind the cottage toward the lake on the north, and they sat down to it with contented hearts; Undine at the knight's feet on the grass. These arrangements being made, Huldbrand began his story in the following manner:—

"It is now about eight days since I rode into the free imperial city which lies yonder on the farther side of the forest. Soon after my arrival a splendid tournament and running at the ring took place there, and I spared neither my horse nor my lance in the encounters.

"Once while I was pausing at the lists to rest from the brisk exercise, and was handing back my helmet to one of my attendants, a female figure of extraordinary beauty caught my attention, as, most magnificently attired, she stood looking on at one of the balconies. I learned, on making inquiry of a person near me, that the name of the young lady was Bertalda, and that she was a foster-daughter of one of the powerful dukes of this country. She too, I observed, was gazing at me, and the consequences were

such as we young knights are wont to experience; whatever success in riding I might have had before, I was now favoured with still better fortune. That evening I was Bertalda's partner in the dance, and I enjoyed the same distinction during the remainder of the festival."

A sharp pain in his left hand, as it hung carelessly beside him, here interrupted Huldbrand's relation, and drew his eye to the part affected. Undine had fastened her pearly teeth, and not without some keenness too, upon one of his fingers, appearing at the same time very gloomy and displeased. On a sudden, however, she looked up in his eyes with an expression of tender melancholy, and whispered almost inaudibly,—

"It is all your own fault."

She then covered her face; and the knight, strangely embarrassed and thoughtful, went on with his story.

"This lady, Bertalda, of whom I spoke, is of a proud and wayward spirit. The second day I saw her she pleased me by no means so much as she had the first, and the third day still less. But I continued about her because she showed me more favour than she did any other knight, and it so happened that I playfully asked her to give me one of her gloves. 'When you have entered the haunted forest all alone,' said she; 'when you have explored its wonders, and brought me a full account of them, the glove is yours.' As to getting her glove, it was of no importance to me whatever, but the word had been spoken, and no honourable knight would permit himself to be urged to such a proof of valour a second time."

"I thought," said Undine, interrupting him, "that she loved you."

"It did appear so," replied Huldbrand.

"Well!" exclaimed the maiden, laughing, "this is beyond belief; she must be very stupid. To drive from her one who was dear to her! And worse than all, into that

ill-omened wood ' The wood and its mysteries, for all I should have cared, might have waited long enough:"

" Yesterday morning, then," pursued the knight, smiling kindly upon Undine, " I set out from the city, my enterprise before me. The early light lay rich upon the verdant turf. It shone so rosy on the slender boles of the trees, and there was so merry a whispering among the leaves, that in my heart I could not but laugh at people who feared meeting anything to terrify them in a spot so delicious. ' I shall soon pass through the forest, and as speedily return,' I said to myself, in the overflow of joyous feeling, and ere I was well aware, I had entered deep among the green shades, while of the plain that lay behind me I was no longer able to catch a glimpse.

" Then the conviction for the first time impressed me, that in a forest of so great extent I might very easily become bewildered, and that this, perhaps, might be the only danger which was likely to threaten those who explored its recesses. So I made a halt, and turned myself in the direction of the sun, which had meantime risen somewhat higher, and while I was looking up to observe it, I saw something black among the boughs of a lofty oak. My first thought was, ' It is a bear ! ' and I grasped my weapon. The object then accosted me from above in a human voice, but in a tone most harsh and hideous : ' If I, overhead here, do not gnaw off these dry branches, Sir Noodle, what shall we have to roast you with when midnight comes ? ' And with that it grinned, and made such a rattling with the branches that my courser became mad with affright, and rushed furiously forward with me before I had time to see distinctly what sort of a devil's beast it was."

" You must not speak so," said the old fisherman, crossing himself. His wife did the same, without saying a word, and Undine, while her eye sparkled with delight, looked at the knight and said, " The best of the story is, however,

that as yet they have not roasted you! Go on, now, you beautiful knight."

The knight then went on with his adventures. "My horse was so wild, that he well-nigh rushed with me against limbs and trunks of trees. He was dripping with sweat through terror, heat, and the violent straining of his muscles. Still he refused to slacken his career. At last, altogether beyond my control, he took his course directly up a stony steep, when suddenly a tall white man flashed before me, and threw himself athwart the way my mad steed was taking. At this apparition he shuddered with new affright, and stopped trembling. I took this chance of recovering my command of him, and now for the first time perceived that my deliverer, so far from being a white *man*, was only a brook of silver brightness, foaming near me in its descent from the hill, while it crossed and arrested my horse's course with its rush of waters."

"Thanks, thanks, dear brook!" cried Undine, clapping her little hands. But the old man shook his head, and looked down in deep thought.

"Hardly had I well settled myself in my saddle, and got the reins in my grasp again," Huldbrand pursued, "when a wizard-like dwarf of a man was already standing at my side, diminutive and ugly beyond conception, his complexion of a brownish-yellow, and his nose scarcely smaller than the rest of him together. The fellow's mouth was slit almost from ear to ear, and he showed his teeth with a grinning smile of idiot courtesy, while he overwhelmed me with bows and scrapes innumerable. The farce now becoming excessively irksome, I thanked him in the fewest words I could well use, turned about my still trembling charger, and purposed either to seek another adventure, or, should I meet with none, to take my way back to the city; for the sun, during my wild chase, had passed the meridian, and was now hastening toward the west. But this villain

of a dwarf sprang at the same instant, and, with a turn as rapid as lightning, stood before my horse again. 'Clear the way there!' I cried fiercely; 'the beast is wild, and will make nothing of running over you.'

"'Ay, ay,' cried the imp with a snarl, and snorting out a laugh still more frightfully idiotic; 'pay me, first pay what you owe me. I stopped your fine little nag for you; without my help, both you and he would be now sprawling below there in that stony ravine. Hu! from what a horrible plunge I've saved you!'

"'Well, don't make any more faces,' said I, 'but take your money and be off, though every word you say is false. It was the brook there, you miserable thing, and not you, that saved me,' and at the same time I dropped a piece of gold into his wizard cap, which he had taken from his head while he was begging before me.

"I then trotted off and left him, but he screamed after me; and on a sudden, with inconceivable quickness, he was close by my side. I started my horse into a gallop. He galloped on with me, though it seemed with great difficulty, and with a strange movement, half ludicrous and half horrible, forcing at the same time every limb and feature into distortion, he held up the gold piece and screamed at every leap, 'Counterfeit! false! false coin! counterfeit!' and such was the strange sound that issued from his hollow breast, you would have supposed that at every scream he must have tumbled upon the ground dead. All this while his disgusting red tongue hung lolling from his mouth.

"I stopped bewildered, and asked, 'What do you mean by this screaming? Take another piece of gold, take two, but leave me.'

"He then began again his hideous salutations of courtesy, and snarled out as before, 'Not gold, it shall not be gold, my young gentleman. I have too much of that trash already, as I will show you in no time.'

"At that moment, and thought itself could not have been more instantaneous, I seemed to have acquired new powers of sight. I could see through the solid green plain, as if it were green glass, and the smooth surface of the earth were round as a globe, and within it I saw crowds of goblins, who were pursuing their pastime and making themselves merry with silver and gold. They were tumbling and rolling about, heads up and heads down; they pelted one another in sport with the precious metals, and with irritating malice blew gold-dust in one another's eyes. My odious companion ordered the others to reach him up a vast quantity of gold; this he showed to me with a laugh, and then flung it again ringing and chinking down the measureless abyss.

"After this contemptuous disregard of gold, he held up the piece I had given him, showing it to his brother goblins below, and they laughed immoderately at a coin so worthless, and hissed me. At last, raising their fingers all smutched with ore, they pointed them at me in scorn; and wilder and wilder, and thicker and thicker, and madder and madder, the crowd were clambering up to where I sat gazing at these wonders. Then terror seized me, as it had before seized my horse. I drove my spurs into his sides, and how far he rushed with me through the forest, during this second of my wild heats, it is impossible to say.

"At last, when I had now come to a dead halt again, the cool of evening was around me. I caught the gleam of a white footpath through the branches of the trees; and presuming it would lead me out of the forest toward the city, I was desirous of working my way into it. But a face, perfectly white and indistinct, with features ever changing, kept thrusting itself out and peering at me between the leaves. I tried to avoid it, but wherever I went, there too appeared the unearthly face. I was maddened with rage at this interruption, and determined to drive my steed at

the appearance full tilt, when such a cloud of white foam came rushing upon me and my horse, that we were almost blinded and glad to turn about and escape. Thus from step to step it forced us on, and ever aside from the foot-path, leaving us for the most part only one direction open. When we advanced in this, it kept following close behind us, yet did not occasion the smallest harm or inconvenience.

"When at times I looked about me at the form, I perceived that the white face, which had splashed upon us its shower of foam, was resting on a body equally white, and of more than gigantic size. Many a time, too, I received the impression that the whole appearance was nothing more than a wandering stream or torrent; but respecting this I could never attain to any certainty. We both of us, horse and rider, became weary as we shaped our course according to the movements of the white man, who continued nodding his head at us, as if he would say, 'Quite right!' And thus, at length, we came out here, at the edge of the wood, where I saw the fresh turf, the waters of the lake, and your little cottage, and where the tall white man disappeared."

"Well, Heaven be praised that he is gone!" cried the old fisherman; and he now began to talk of how his guest could most conveniently return to his friends in the city. Upon this, Undine began laughing to herself, but so very low that the sound was hardly perceivable. Huldbrand observing it, said, "I thought you were glad to see me here; why, then, do you now appear so happy when our talk turns upon my going away?"

"Because you cannot go way," answered Undine. "Pray make a single attempt; try with a boat, with your horse, or alone, as you please, to cross that forest stream which has burst its bounds; or rather, make no trial at all, for you would be dashed to pieces by the stones and trunks of trees which you see driven on with such violence. And

as to the lake, I know that well; even my father dares not venture out with his boat far enough to help you."

Huldbrand rose, smiling, in order to look about and observe whether the state of things were such as Undine had represented it to be. The old man accompanied him, and the maiden went merrily dancing beside them. They found all, in fact, just as Undine had said, and that the knight, whether willing or not willing, must submit to remaining on the island, so lately a peninsula, until the flood should subside.

When the three were now returning to the cottage after their ramble, the knight whispered in the ear of the little maiden, "Well, dear Undine, are you angry at my remaining?"

"Ah," she pettishly replied, "do not speak to me! If I had not bitten you, who knows what fine things you would have put into your story about Bertalda?"

III

CHAPTER

IT may have happened to thee, my dear reader, after being much driven to and fro in the world, to reach at length a spot where all was well with thee. The love of home and of its peaceful joys, innate to all, again sprang up in thy heart; thou thoughtest that thy home was decked with all the flowers of childhood, and of that purest, deepest love which had grown upon the graves of thy beloved, and that here it was good to live and to build houses. Even if thou didst err, and hast had bitterly to mourn thy error, it is nothing to my purpose, and thou thyself wilt not like to dwell on the sad recollection. But recall those unspeakably sweet feelings, that angelic greeting of peace, and thou wilt be able to understand what was

the happiness of the knight Huldbrand during his abode on that narrow slip of land.

He frequently observed, with heartfelt satisfaction, that the forest stream continued every day to swell and roll on with a more impetuous sweep ; and this forced him to prolong his stay on the island. Part of the day he wandered about with an old cross-bow, which he found in a corner of the cottage, and had repaired in order to shoot the water-fowl that flew over ; and all that he was lucky enough to hit he brought home for a good roast in the kitchen. When he came in with his booty, Undine seldom failed to greet him with a scolding, because he had cruelly deprived the happy joyous little creatures of life as they were sporting above in the blue ocean of the air ; nay more, she often wept bitterly when she viewed the water-fowl dead in his hand. But at other times, when he returned without having shot any, she gave him a scolding equally serious, since, owing to his carelessness and want of skill, they must now put up with a dinner of fish. Her playful taunts ever touched his heart with delight ; the more so, as she generally strove to make up for her pretended ill-humour with endearing caresses.

The old people saw with pleasure this familiarity of Undine and Huldbrand ; they looked upon them as betrothed, or even as married, and living with them in their old age on their island, now torn off from the mainland. The loneliness of his situation strongly impressed also the young Huldbrand with the feeling that he was already Undine's bridegroom. It seemed to him as if, beyond those encompassing floods, there were no other world in existence, or at any rate as if he could never cross them, and again associate with the world of other men ; and when at times his grazing steed raised his head and neighed to him, seemingly inquiring after his knightly achievements and reminding him of them, or when his coat-of-arms sternly shone

upon him from the embroidery of his saddle and the caparisons of his horse, or when his sword happened to fall from the nail on which it was hanging in the cottage, and flashed on his eye as it slipped from the scabbard in its fall, he quieted the doubts of his mind by saying to himself, "Undine cannot be a fisherman's daughter. She is, in all probability, a native of some remote region, and a member of some illustrious family."

There was one thing, indeed, to which he had a strong aversion: this was to hear the old dame reproving Undine. The wild girl, it is true, commonly laughed at the reproof, making no attempt to conceal the extravagance of her mirth; but it appeared to him like touching his own honour; and still he found it impossible to blame the aged wife of the fisherman, since Undine always deserved at least ten times as many reproofs as she received; so he continued to feel in his heart an affectionate tenderness for the ancient mistress of the house, and his whole life flowed on in the calm stream of contentment.

There came, however, an interruption at last. The fisherman and the knight had been accustomed at dinner, and also in the evening when the wind roared without, as it rarely failed to do towards night, to enjoy together a flask of wine. But now their whole stock, which the fisherman had from time to time brought with him from the city, was at last exhausted, and they were both quite out of humour at the circumstance. That day Undine laughed at them excessively, but they were not disposed to join in her jests with the same gaiety as usual. Toward evening she went out of the cottage, to escape, as she said, the sight of two such long and tiresome faces.

While it was yet twilight, some appearances of a tempest seemed to be again mustering in the sky, and the waves already heaved and roared around them: the knight and the fisherman sprang to the door in terror, to bring home

the maiden, remembering the anguish of that night when Huldbrand had first entered the cottage. But Undine met them at the same moment, clapping her little hands in high glee.

"What will you give me," she cried, "to provide you with wine? or rather, you need not give me anything," she continued; "for I am already satisfied, if you look more cheerful, and are in better spirits, than throughout this last most wearisome day. Only come with me; the forest stream has driven ashore a cask; and I will be condemned to sleep through a whole week, if it is not a wine-cask."

The men followed her, and actually found, in a bushy cove of the shore, a cask, which inspired them with as much joy as if they were sure it contained the generous old wine for which they were thirsting. They first of all, and with as much expedition as possible, rolled it toward the cottage; for heavy clouds were again rising in the west, and they could discern the waves of the lake in the fading light lifting their white foaming heads, as if looking out for the rain, which threatened every instant to pour upon them. Undine helped the men as much as she was able; and as the shower, with a roar of wind, came suddenly sweeping on in rapid pursuit, she raised her finger with a merry menace toward the dark mass of clouds, and cried:

"You cloud, you cloud, have a care! beware how you wet us; we are some way from shelter yet."

The old man reproved her for this sally, as a sinful presumption; but she laughed to herself softly, and no mischief came from her wild behaviour. Nay more, what was beyond their expectation, they reached their comfortable hearth unwet, with their prize secured; but the cask had hardly been broached, and proved to contain wine of a remarkably fine flavour, when the rain first poured down unrestrained from the black cloud, the tempest raved

through the tops of the trees, and swept far over the billows of the deep.

Having immediately filled several bottles from the cask, which promised them a supply for a long time, they drew round the glowing hearth; and, comfortably secured from the tempest, they sat tasting the flavour of their wine and bandying jests.

But the old fisherman suddenly became extremely grave, and said: "Ah, great God! here we sit, rejoicing over this rich gift, while he to whom it first belonged, and from whom it was wrested by the fury of the stream, must there also, it is more than probable, have lost his life."

"No such thing," said Undine, smiling, as she filled the knight's cup to the brim.

But he exclaimed: "By my unsullied honour, old father, if I knew where to find and rescue him, no fear of exposure to the night, nor any peril, should deter me from making the attempt. At least, I can promise you that if I again reach an inhabited country, I will find out the owner of this wine or his heirs, and make double and triple reimbursement."

The old man was gratified with this assurance; he gave the knight a nod of approbation, and now drained his cup with an easier conscience and more relish.

Undine, however, said to Huldbrand: "As to the repayment and your gold, you may do whatever you like. But what you said about your venturing out, and searching, and exposing yourself to danger, appears to me far from wise. I should cry my very eyes out, should you perish in such a wild attempt; and is it not true that you would prefer staying here with me and the good wine?"

"Most assuredly," answered Huldbrand, smiling.

"Then, you see," replied Undine, "you spoke unwisely. For charity begins at home; and why need we trouble ourselves about our neighbours?"

The mistress of the house turned away from her, sighing and shaking her head; while the fisherman forgot his wonted indulgence toward the graceful maiden, and thus rebuked her:

"That sounds exactly as if you had been brought up by heathens and Turks;" and he finished his reproof by adding, "May God forgive both me and you—unfeeling child!"

"Well, say what you will, that is what I think and feel," replied Undine, "whoever brought me up; and all your talking cannot help it."

"Silence!" exclaimed the fisherman, in a voice of stern rebuke; and she, who with all her wild spirit was extremely alive to fear, shrank from him, moved close up to Huldbrand, trembling, and said very softly:

"Are you also angry, dear friend?"

The knight pressed her soft hand, and tenderly stroked her locks. He was unable to utter a word, for his vexation, arising from the old man's severity towards Undine, closed his lips; and thus the two couples sat opposite to each other, at once heated with anger and in embarrassed silence.

In the midst of this stillness a low knocking at the door startled them all; for there are times when a slight circumstance, coming unexpectedly upon us, startles us like something supernatural. But there was the further source of alarm, that the enchanted forest lay so near them, and that their place of abode seemed at present inaccessible to any human being. While they were looking upon one another in doubt, the knocking was again heard, accompanied with a deep groan. The knight sprang to seize his sword. But the old man said, in a low whisper:

"If it be what I fear it is, no weapon of yours can protect us."

Undine in the meanwhile went to the door, and cried with the firm voice of fearless displeasure: "Spirits of the

earth! if mischief be your aim, Kühleborn shall teach you better manners."

The terror of the rest was increased by this wild speech; they looked fearfully upon the girl, and Huldbrand was just recovering presence of mind enough to ask what she meant, when a voice reached them from without:

"I am no spirit of the earth, though a spirit still in its earthly body. You that are within the cottage there, if you fear God and would afford me assistance, open your door to me."

By the time these words were spoken, Undine had already opened it; and the lamp throwing a strong light upon the stormy night, they perceived an aged priest without, who stepped back in terror, when his eye fell on the unexpected sight of a little damsel of such exquisite beauty. Well might he think there must be magic in the wind and witchcraft at work, when a form of such surpassing loveliness appeared at the door of so humble a dwelling. So he lifted up his voice in prayer:

"Let all good spirits praise the Lord God!"

"I am no spectre," said Undine, with a smile. "Do I look so very frightful? And you see that I do not shrink from holy words. I too have knowledge of God, and understand the duty of praising Him; every one, to be sure, has his own way of doing this, for so He has created us. Come in, father; you will find none but worthy people here."

The holy man came bowing in, and cast round a glance of scrutiny, wearing at the same time a very placid and venerable air. But water was dropping from every fold of his dark garments, from his long white beard and the white locks of his hair. The fisherman and the knight took him to another apartment, and furnished him with a change of raiment, while they gave his own clothes to the women to dry. The aged stranger thanked them in a manner the

most humble and courteous; but on the knight's offering him his splendid cloak to wrap round him, he could not be persuaded to take it, but chose instead an old grey coat that belonged to the fisherman.

They then returned to the common apartment. The mistress of the house immediately offered her great chair to the priest, and continued urging it upon him till she saw him fairly in possession of it. "You are old and exhausted," said she, "and are, moreover, a man of God."

Undine shoved under the stranger's feet her little stool, on which at all other times she used to sit near to Huldbrand, and showed herself most gentle and amiable towards the old man. Huldbrand whispered some raillery in her ear, but she replied, gravely:

"He is a minister of that Being who created us all; and holy things are not to be treated with lightness."

The knight and the fisherman now refreshed the priest with food and wine; and when he had somewhat recovered his strength and spirits, he began to relate how he had the day before set out from his cloister, which was situated far off beyond the great lake, in order to visit the bishop, and acquaint him with the distress into which the cloister and its tributary villages had fallen, owing to the extraordinary floods. After a long and wearisome wandering, on account of the rise of the waters, he had been this day compelled toward evening to procure the aid of a couple of boatmen, and cross over an arm of the lake which had burst its usual boundary.

"But hardly," continued he, "had our small ferry-boat touched the waves, when that furious tempest burst forth which is still raging over our heads. It seemed as if the billows had been waiting our approach only to rush on us with a madness the more wild. The oars were wrested from the grasp of my men in an instant; and shivered by the resistless force, they drove farther and farther out before

us upon the waves. Unable to direct our course, we yielded to the blind power of nature, and seemed to fly over the surges toward your distant shore, which we already saw looming through the mist and foam of the deep. Then it was at last that our boat turned short from its course, and rocked with a motion that became more wild and dizzy : I know not whether it was overset, or the violence of the motion threw me overboard. In my agony and struggle at the thought of a near and terrible death, the waves bore me onward, till I was cast ashore here beneath the trees of your island."

"Yes, an island!" cried the fisherman ; "a short time ago it was only a point of land. But now, since the forest stream and lake have become all but mad, it appears to be entirely changed."

" I observed something of it," replied the priest, " as I stole along the shore in the obscurity ; and hearing nothing around me but a sort of wild uproar, I perceived at last that the noise came from a point exactly where a beaten footpath disappeared. I now caught the light in your cottage, and ventured hither, where I cannot sufficiently thank my Heavenly Father that, after preserving me from the waters, He has also conducted me to such pious people as you are ; and the more so, as it is difficult to say whether I shall ever behold any other persons in this world except you four."

" What mean you by those words ? " asked the fisherman.

" Can you tell me, then, how long this commotion of the elements will last ? " replied the priest. " I am old ; the stream of my life may easily sink into the ground and vanish before the overflowing of that forest stream shall subside. And, indeed, it is not impossible that more and more of the foaming waters may rush in between you and yonder forest, until you are so far removed from the rest of the world, that your small fishing-canoe may be incapable of

passing over, and the inhabitants of the continent entirely forget you in your old age amid the dissipation and diversions of life."

At this melancholy foreboding the old lady shrank back with a feeling of alarm, crossed herself, and cried, "God forbid!"

But the fisherman looked upon her with a smile and said, "What a strange being is man! Suppose the worst to happen; our state would not be different; at any rate, your own would not, dear wife, from what it is at present. For have you, these many years, been farther from home than the border of the forest? And have you seen a single human being beside Undine and myself? It is now only a short time since the coming of the knight and the priest. They will remain with us, even if we do become a forgotten island; so after all you will be a gainer."

"I know not," replied the ancient dame; "it is a dismal thought, when brought fairly home to the mind, that we are for ever separated from mankind, even though in fact we never do know nor see them."

"Then *you* will remain with us—then you will remain with us!" whispered Undine, in a voice scarcely audible and half singing, while she nestled closer to Huldbrand's side. But he was immersed in the deep and strange musings of his own mind. The region, on the farther side of the forest river, seemed, since the last words of the priest, to have been withdrawing farther and farther, in dim perspective, from his view; and the blooming island on which he lived grew green and smiled more freshly in his fancy. His bride glowed like the fairest rose, not of this obscure nook only, but even of the whole wide world; and the priest was now present.

Added to which, the mistress of the family was directing an angry glance at Undine, because, even in the presence of the priest, she leant so fondly on the knight; and it

seemed as if she was on the point of breaking out in harsh reproof. Then burst forth from the mouth of Huldbrand, as he turned to the priest, "Father, you here see before you an affianced pair; and if this maiden and these good old people have no objection, you shall unite us this very evening."

The aged couple were both exceedingly surprised. They had often, it is true, thought of this, but as yet they had never mentioned it; and now, when the knight spoke, it came upon them like something wholly new and unexpected. Undine became suddenly grave, and looked down thoughtfully, while the priest made inquiries respecting the circumstances of their acquaintance, and asked the old people whether they gave their consent to the union. After a great number of questions and answers, the affair was arranged to the satisfaction of all; and the mistress of the house went to prepare the bridal apartment of the young couple, and also, with a view to grace the nuptial solemnity, to seek for two consecrated tapers, which she had for a long time kept by her, for this occasion.

The knight in the meanwhile busied himself about his golden chain, for the purpose of disengaging two of its links, that he might make an exchange of rings with his bride. But when she saw his object, she started from her trance of musing, and exclaimed—

"Not so! my parents by no means sent me into the world so perfectly destitute; on the contrary, they foresaw, even at that early period, that such a night as this would come."

Thus speaking she went out of the room, and a moment after returned with two costly rings, of which she gave one to her bridegroom, and kept the other for herself. The old fisherman was beyond measure astonished at this; and his wife, who was just re-entering the room, was even more surprised than he, that neither of them had ever seen these jewels in the child's possession.

"My parents," said Undine, "sewed these trinkets to that beautiful raiment which I wore the very day I came to you. They also charged me on no account whatever to mention them to any one before my wedding evening. At the time of my coming, therefore, I took them off in secret, and have kept them concealed to the present hour."

The priest now cut short all further questioning and wondering, while he lighted the consecrated tapers, placed them on a table, and ordered the bridal pair to stand opposite to him. He then pronounced the few solemn words of the ceremony, and made them one. The elder couple gave the younger their blessing; and the bride, gently trembling and thoughtful, leaned upon the knight.

The priest then spoke out: "You are strange people, after all; for why did you tell me that you were the only inhabitants of the island? So far is this from being true, I have seen, the whole time I was performing the ceremony, a tall, stately man, in a white mantle, standing opposite to me, looking in at the window. He must be still waiting before the door, if peradventure you would invite him to come in."

"God forbid!" cried the old lady, shrinking back; the fisherman shook his head, without opening his lips; and Huldbrand sprang to the window. It seemed to *him* that he could still discern a white streak, which soon disappeared in the gloom. He convinced the priest that he must have been mistaken in his impression; and they all sat down together round a bright and comfortable hearth.

IV
CHAPTER

BEFORE the nuptial ceremony, and during its performance, Undine had shown a modest gentleness and maidenly reserve; but it now seemed as if all the wayward freaks that effervesced within her burst forth with an extravagance only the more bold and unrestrained. She teased her bridegroom, her foster-parents, and even the priest, whom she had just now revered so highly, with all sorts of childish tricks; but when the ancient dame was about to reprove her too frolicsome spirit, the knight, in a few words, imposed silence upon her by speaking of Undine as his wife.

The knight was himself, indeed, just as little pleased with

Undine's childish behaviour as the rest; but all his looks and half-reproachful words were to no purpose. It is true, whenever the bride observed the dissatisfaction of her husband—and this occasionally happened—she became more quiet, placed herself beside him, stroked his face with caressing fondness, whispered something smilingly in his ear, and in this manner smoothed the wrinkles that were gathering on his brow. But the moment after, some wild whim would make her resume her antic movements; and all went worse than before.

The priest then spoke in a kind although serious tone: "My fair young maiden, surely no one can look on you without pleasure; but remember betimes so to attune your soul that it may produce a harmony ever in accordance with the soul of your wedded bridegroom."

"SOUL!" cried Undine with a laugh. "What you say has a remarkably pretty sound; and for most people, too, it may be a very instructive and profitable caution. But when a person has no soul at all, how, I pray you, can such attuning be then possible? And this, in truth, is just my condition."

The priest was much hurt, but continued silent in holy displeasure, and turned away his face from the maiden in sorrow. She, however, went up to him with the most winning sweetness, and said:

"Nay, I entreat you first listen to me, before you are angry with me; for your anger is painful to me, and you ought not to give pain to a creature that has not hurt you. Only have patience with me, and I will explain to you every word of what I meant."

It was evident that she had come to say something important; when she suddenly faltered as if seized with inward shuddering, and burst into a passion of tears. They were none of them able to understand the intenseness of her feelings; and, with mingled emotions of fear and

anxiety, they gazed on her in silence. Then, wiping away her tears, and looking earnestly at the priest, she at last said :

"There must be something lovely, but at the same time something most awful, about a soul. In the name of God, holy man, were it not better that we never shared a gift so mysterious?"

Again she paused, and restrained her tears, as if waiting for an answer. All in the cottage had risen from their seats, and stepped back from her with horror. She, however, seemed to have eyes for no one but the holy man; an awful curiosity was painted on her features, which appeared terrible to the others.

"Heavily must the soul weigh down its possessor," she pursued, when no one returned her any answer—"very heavily! for already its approaching image overshadows me with anguish and mourning. And, alas, I have till now been so merry and light-hearted!" and she burst into another flood of tears, and covered her face with her veil.

The priest, going up to her with a solemn look, now addressed himself to her, and conjured her, by the name of God most holy, if any spirit of evil possessed her, to remove the light covering from her face. But she sank before him on her knees, and repeated after him every sacred expression he uttered, giving praise to God, and protesting "that she wished well to the whole world."

The priest then spoke to the knight: "Sir bridegroom, I leave you alone with her whom I have united to you in marriage. So far as I can discover, there is nothing of evil in her, but assuredly much that is wonderful. What I recommend to you is—prudence, love, and fidelity."

Thus speaking, he left the apartment; and the fisherman, with his wife, followed him, crossing themselves.

Undine had sunk upon her knees. She uncovered her face, and exclaimed, while she looked fearfully round upon

She sank before him on her knees.—*p.* 202.

Huldbrand, "Alas! you will now refuse to look upon me as your own; and still I have done nothing evil, poor unhappy child that I am!" She spoke these words with a look so infinitely sweet and touching, that her bridegroom forgot both the confession that had shocked, and the mystery that had perplexed him; and hastening to her, he raised her in his arms. She smiled through her tears; and that smile was like the morning light playing upon a small stream. "You cannot desert me!" she whispered confidingly, and stroked the knight's cheeks with her little soft hands. He turned away from the frightful thoughts that still lurked in the recesses of his soul, and were persuading him that he had been married to a fairy, or some spiteful and mischievous being of the spirit-world. Only the single question, and that almost unawares, escaped from his lips.

"Dearest Undine, tell me this one thing: what was it you meant by 'spirits of earth' and 'Kühleborn,' when the priest stood knocking at the door?"

"Tales! mere tales of children!" answered Undine, laughing, now quite restored to her wonted gaiety. "I first frightened you with them, and you frightened me. This is the end of the story, and of our nuptial evening."

"Nay, not so," replied the enamoured knight, extinguishing the tapers, and a thousand times kissing his beautiful and beloved bride; while, lighted by the moon that shone brightly through the windows, he bore her into their bridal apartment.

The fresh light of morning woke the young married pair: but Huldbrand lay lost in silent reflection. Whenever, during the night, he had fallen asleep, strange and horrible dreams of spectres had disturbed him; and these shapes, grinning at him by stealth, strove to disguise themselves as beautiful females; and from beautiful females they all at once assumed the appearance of dragons. And when he started up, aroused by the intrusion of

these hideous forms, the moonlight shone pale and cold before the windows without. He looked affrighted at Undine, in whose arms he had fallen asleep: and she was reposing in unaltered beauty and sweetness beside him. Then pressing her rosy lips with a light kiss, he again fell into a slumber, only to be awakened by new terrors.

When fully awake, he had thought over this connection. He reproached himself for any doubt that could lead him into error in regard to his lovely wife. He also confessed to her his injustice; but she only gave him her fair hand, sighed deeply, and remained silent. Yet a glance of fervent tenderness, an expression of the soul beaming in her eyes, such as he had never witnessed there before, left him in undoubted assurance that Undine bore him no ill-will.

He then rose joyfully, and leaving her, went to the common apartment, where the inmates of the house had already met. The three were sitting round the hearth with an air of anxiety about them, as if they feared trusting themselves to raise their voice above a low, apprehensive undertone. The priest appeared to be praying in his inmost spirit, with a view to avert some fatal calamity. But when they observed the young husband come forth so cheerful, they dispelled the cloud that remained upon their brows: the old fisherman even began to laugh with the knight till his aged wife herself could not help smiling with great good-humour.

Undine had in the meantime got ready, and now entered the room; all rose to meet her, but remained fixed in perfect admiration—she was so changed, and yet the same. The priest, with paternal affection beaming from his countenance, first went up to her; and as he raised his hand to pronounce a blessing, the beautiful bride sank on her knees before him with religious awe; she begged his pardon in terms both respectful and submissive for any foolish things she might have uttered the evening before,

and entreated him with emotion to pray for the welfare of her soul. She then rose, kissed her foster-parents, and, after thanking them for all the kindness they had shown her, said:

"Oh, I now feel in my inmost heart how much, how infinitely much, you have done for me, you dear, dear friends of my childhood!"

At first she was wholly unable to tear herself away from their affectionate caresses; but the moment she saw the good old mother busy in getting breakfast, she went to the hearth, applied herself to cooking the food and putting it on the table, and would not suffer her to take the least share in the work.

She continued in this frame of spirit the whole day: calm, kind attentive—half matronly, and half girlish. The three who had been longest acquainted with her expected every instant to see her capricious spirit break out in some whimsical change or sportive vagary. But their fears were quite unnecessary. Undine continued as mild and gentle as an angel. The priest found it all but impossible to remove his eyes from her; and he often said to the bridegroom:

"The bounty of Heaven, sir, through me its unworthy instrument, entrusted to you yesterday an invaluable treasure; cherish it as you ought, and it will promote your temporal and eternal welfare."

Toward evening Undine was hanging upon the knight's arm with lowly tenderness, while she drew him gently out before the door, where the setting sun shone richly over the fresh grass, and upon the high, slender boles of the trees. Her emotion was visible: the dew of sadness and love swam in her eyes, while a tender and fearful secret seemed to hover upon her lips, but was only made known by hardly-breathed sighs. She led her husband farther and farther onward without speaking. When he asked her questions, she replied only with looks, in which, it is true, there appeared to be no immediate answer to his inquiries, but

a whole heaven of love and timid devotion. Thus they reached the margin of the swollen forest stream, and the knight was astonished to see it gliding away with so gentle a murmuring of its waves, that no vestige of its former swell and wildness was now discernible.

"By morning it will be wholly drained off," said the beautiful wife, almost weeping, "and you will then be able to travel, without anything to hinder you, whithersoever you will."

"Not without you, dear Undine," replied the knight, laughing; "think, only, were I disposed to leave you, both the Church and the spiritual powers, the Emperor and the laws of the realm, would require the fugitive to be seized and restored to you."

"All this depends on you—all depends on you," whispered his little companion, half weeping and half smiling. "But I still feel sure that you will not leave me; I love you too deeply to fear that misery. Now bear me over to that little island which lies before us. There shall the decision be made. I could easily, indeed, glide through that mere rippling of the water without your aid, but it is so sweet to lie in your arms; and should you determine to put me away, I shall have rested in them once more, ... for the last time."

Huldbrand was so full of strange anxiety and emotion, that he knew not what answer to make her. He took her in his arms and carried her over, now first realizing the fact that this was the same little island from which he had borne her back to the old fisherman, the first night of his arrival. On the farther side, he placed her upon the soft grass, and was throwing himself lovingly near his beautiful burden; but she said to him, "Not here, but opposite me. I shall read my doom in your eyes, even before your lips pronounce it: now listen attentively to what I shall relate to you." And she began:

"You must know, my own love, that there are beings in the elements which bear the strongest resemblance to the human race, and which, at the same time, but seldom become visible to you. The wonderful salamanders sparkle and sport amid the flames; deep in the earth the meagre and malicious gnomes pursue their revels; the forest-spirits belong to the air, and wander in the woods; while in the seas, rivers, and streams live the widespread race of water-spirits. These last, beneath resounding domes of crystal, through which the sky can shine with its sun and stars, inhabit a region of light and beauty; lofty coral-trees glow with blue and crimson fruits in their gardens; they walk over the pure sand of the sea, among exquisitely variegated shells, and amid whatever of beauty the old world possessed, such as the present is no more worthy to enjoy—creations which the floods covered with their secret veils of silver; and now these noble monuments sparkle below, stately and solemn, and bedewed by the water, which loves them, and calls forth from their crevices delicate moss-flowers and enwreathing tufts of sedge.

"Now the nation that dwell there are very fair and lovely to behold, for the most part more beautiful than human beings. Many a fisherman has been so fortunate as to catch a view of a delicate maiden of the waters, while she was floating and singing upon the deep. He would then spread far the fame of her beauty; and to such wonderful females men are wont to give the name of Undines. But what need of saying more?—You, my dear husband, now actually behold an Undine before you."

The knight would have persuaded himself that his lovely wife was under the influence of one of her odd whims, and that she was only amusing herself and him with her extravagant inventions. He wished it might be so. But with whatever emphasis he said this to himself, he still could not credit the hope for a moment: a strange shivering

shot through his soul; unable to utter a word, he gazed upon the sweet speaker with a fixed eye. She shook her head in distress, sighed from her full heart, and then proceeded in the following manner:—

"We should be far superior to you, who are another race of the human family,—for we also call ourselves human beings, as we resemble them in form and features—had we not one evil peculiar to ourselves. Both we and the beings I have mentioned as inhabiting the other elements vanish into air at death and go out of existence, spirit and body, so that no vestige of us remains; and when you hereafter awake to a purer state of being, we shall remain where sand, and sparks, and wind, and waves remain. Thus we have no souls; the element moves us, and, again, is obedient to our will, while we live, though it scatters us like dust when we die; and as we have nothing to trouble us, we are as merry as nightingales, little gold-fishes, and other pretty children of nature.

"But all beings aspire to rise in the scale of existence higher than they are. It was therefore the wish of my father, who is a powerful water-prince in the Mediterranean Sea, that his only daughter should become possessed of a soul, although she should have to endure many of the sufferings of those who share that gift.

"Now the race to which I belong have no other means of obtaining a soul than by forming with an individual of your own the most intimate union of love. I am now possessed of a soul, and my soul thanks you, my best beloved, and never shall cease to thank you, if you do not render my whole future life miserable. For what will become of me, if you avoid and reject me? Still, I would not keep you as my own by artifice. And should you decide to cast me off, then do it now, and return alone to the shore. I will plunge into this brook, where my uncle will receive me; my uncle, who here in the forest, far removed from his other friends, passes his

strange and solitary existence. But he is powerful, as well as revered and beloved by many great rivers ; and as he brought me hither to the fisherman a light-hearted and laughing child, he will take me home to my parents a woman, gifted with a soul, with power to love and to suffer."

She was about to add something more, when Huldbrand, with the most heartfelt tenderness and love, clasped her in his arms, and again bore her back to the shore. There, amid tears and kisses, he first swore never to forsake his affectionate wife, and esteemed himself even more happy than Pygmalion, for whom Venus gave life to his beautiful statue, and thus changed it into a beloved wife. Supported by his arm, and in the confidence of affection, Undine returned to the cottage ; and now she first realized with her whole heart how little cause she had for regretting what she had left—the crystal palace of her mysterious father.

V
CHAPTER

NEXT morning, when Huldbrand awoke from slumber, and perceived that his beautiful wife was not by his side, he began to give way again to his wild imaginations—that his marriage, and even the lovely Undine herself, were only shadows without substance—only mere illusions of enchantment. But she entered the door at the same moment, kissed him, seated herself on the bed by his side, and said:

"I have been out somewhat early this morning, to see whether my uncle keeps his word. He has already restored the waters of the flood to his own calm channel, and he now flows through the forest a rivulet as before, in a lonely and dreamlike current. His friends, too, both of the water

and the air, have resumed their usual peaceful tenor; all will again proceed with order and tranquillity; and you can travel homeward, without fear of the flood, whenever you choose."

It seemed to the mind of Huldbrand that he must be in some waking dream, so little was he able to understand the nature of his wife's strange relative. Notwithstanding this, he made no remark upon what she had told him, and her surpassing loveliness soon lulled every misgiving and discomfort to rest.

Some time afterwards, while he was standing with her before the door, and surveying the verdant point of land, with its boundary of bright waters, such a feeling of bliss came over him in this cradle of his love, that he exclaimed:

"Shall we, then, so early as to-day, begin our journey? Why should we? It is probable that abroad in the world we shall find no days more delightful than those we have spent in this green isle so secret and so secure. Let us yet see the sun go down here two or three times more."

"Just as my lord wills," replied Undine meekly. "Only we must remember, that my foster-parents will, at all events, see me depart with pain; and should they now, for the first time, discover the true soul in me, and how fervently I can now love and honour them, their feeble eyes would surely become blind with weeping. As yet they consider my present quietness and gentleness as of no better promise than they were formerly—like the calm of the lake just while the air remains tranquil—and they will learn soon to cherish a little tree or flower as they have cherished me. Let me not, then, make known to them this newly bestowed, this loving heart, at the very moment they must lose it for this world; and how could I conceal what I have gained, if we continued longer together?"

Huldbrand yielded to her representation, and went to the aged couple to confer with them respecting his journey,

on which he proposed to set out that very hour. The priest offered himself as a companion to the young married pair; and, after taking a short farewell, he held the bridle, while the knight lifted his beautiful wife upon his horse; and with rapid steps they crossed the dry channel with her toward the forest. Undine wept in silent but intense emotion; the old people, as she moved away, were more clamorous in the expression of their grief. They appeared to feel, at the moment of separation, all that they were losing in their affectionate foster-daughter.

The three travellers had reached the thickest shades of the forest without interchanging a word. It must have been a fair sight, in that hall of leafy verdure, to see this lovely woman's form sitting on the noble and richly-ornamented steed, on her left hand the venerable priest in the white garb of his order, on her right the blooming young knight, clad in splendid raiment of scarlet, gold, and violet, girt with a sword that flashed in the sun, and attentively walking beside her. Huldbrand had no eyes but for his wife; Undine, who had dried her tears of tenderness, had no eyes but for him; and they soon entered into the still and voiceless converse of looks and gestures, from which, after some time, they were awakened by the low discourse which the priest was holding with a fourth traveller, who had meanwhile joined them unobserved.

He wore a white gown, resembling in form the dress of the priest's order, except that his hood hung very low over his face, and that the whole drapery floated in such wide folds around him as obliged him every moment to gather it up and throw it over his arm, or by some management of this sort to get it out of his way, and still it did not seem in the least to impede his movements. When the young couple became aware of his presence, he was saying:

"And so, venerable sir, many as have been the years I have dwelt here in this forest, I have never received the

name of hermit in your sense of the word. For, as I said before, I know nothing of penance, and I think, too, that I have no particular need of it. Do you ask me why I am so attached to the forest? It is because its scenery is so peculiarly picturesque, and affords me so much pastime when, in my floating white garments, I pass through its world of leaves and dusky shadows;—and when a sweet sunbeam glances down upon me at times unexpectedly."

"You are a very singular man," replied the priest, "and I should like to have a more intimate acquaintance with you."

"And who, then, may you be yourself, to pass from one thing to another?" inquired the stranger.

"I am called Father Heilmann," answered the holy man; "and I am from the cloister of Our Lady of the Salutation, beyond the lake."

"Well, well," replied the stranger, "my name is Kühleborn; and were I a stickler for the nice distinctions of rank, I might, with equal propriety, require you to give me the title of noble lord of Kühleborn, or free lord of Kühleborn; for I am as free as the birds in the forest, and, it may be, a trifle more so. For example, I now have something to tell that young lady there." And before they were aware of his purpose, he was on the other side of the priest, close to Undine, and stretching himself high into the air, in order to whisper something in her ear. But she shrank from him in terror, and exclaimed:

"I have nothing more to do with you."

"Ho, ho," cried the stranger with a laugh, "you have made a grand marriage indeed, since you no longer know your own relations! Have you no recollection, then, of your uncle Kühleborn, who so faithfully bore you on his back to this region?"

"However that may be," replied Undine, "I entreat you never to appear in my presence again. I am now afraid of

you ; and will not my husband fear and forsake me, if he sees me associate with such strange company and kindred ? "

" You must not forget, my little niece," said Kühleborn, " that I am with you here as a guide ; otherwise those madcap spirits of the earth, the gnomes that haunt this forest, would play you some of their mischievous pranks. Let me therefore still accompany you in peace. Even the old priest there had a better recollection of me than you have ; for he just now assured me that I seemed to be very familiar to him, and that I must have been with him in the ferry-boat, out of which he tumbled into the waves. He certainly did see me there ; for I was no other than the water-spout that tore him out of it, and kept him from sinking, while I safely wafted him ashore to your wedding."

Undine and the knight turned their eyes upon Father Heilmann ; but he appeared to be moving forward, just as if he were dreaming or walking in his sleep, and no longer to be conscious of a word that was spoken. Undine then said to Kühleborn : " I already see yonder the end of the forest. We have no further need of your assistance, and nothing now gives us alarm but yourself. I therefore beseech you, by our mutual love and good-will, to vanish, and allow us to proceed in peace."

Kühleborn seemed to become angry at this : he darted a frightful look at Undine, and grinned fiercely upon her. She shrieked aloud, and called her husband to protect her. The knight sprang round the horse as quick as lightning, and, brandishing his sword, struck at Kühleborn's head. But instead of severing it from his body, the sword merely flashed through a torrent, which rushed foaming near them from a lofty cliff ; and with a splash, which much resembled in sound a burst of laughter, the stream all at once poured upon them and gave them a thorough wetting. The priest, as if suddenly awakening from a trance, coolly observed : " This is what I have been some time expecting, because

the brook has descended from the steep so close beside us—though at first sight, indeed, it appeared to resemble a man, and to possess the power of speech."

As the waterfall came rushing from its crag, it distinctly uttered these words in Huldbrand's ear: "Rash knight! valiant knight! I am not angry with you; I have no quarrel with you; only continue to defend your lovely little wife with the same spirit, you bold knight! you valiant champion!"

After advancing a few steps farther, the travellers came out upon open ground. The imperial city lay bright before them; and the evening sun, which gilded its towers with gold, kindly dried their garments that had been so completely drenched.

The sudden disappearance of the young knight, Huldbrand of Ringstetten, had occasioned much remark in the imperial city, and no small concern amongst those who, as well on account of his expertness in tourney and dance, as of his mild and amiable manners, had become attached to him. His attendants were unwilling to quit the place without their master, although not a soul of them had been courageous enough to follow him into the fearful recesses of the forest. They remained, therefore, at the hostelry, idly hoping, as men are wont to do, and keeping the fate of their lost lord fresh in remembrance by their lamentations.

Now when the violent storms and floods had been observed immediately after his departure, the destruction of the handsome stranger became all but certain; even Bertalda had openly discovered her sorrow, and detested herself for having been the cause of his taking that fatal excursion into the forest. Her foster-parents, the duke and duchess, had meanwhile come to take her away; but Bertalda persuaded them to remain with her until some certain news of Huldbrand should be obtained, whether he were living or dead. She endeavoured also to prevail upon

several young knights, who were assiduous in courting her favour, to go in quest of the noble adventurer in the forest. But she refused to pledge her hand as the reward of the enterprise, because she still cherished, it might be, a hope of its being claimed by the returning knight ; and no one would consent, for a glove, a riband, or even a kiss, to expose his life to bring back so very dangerous a rival.

When Huldbrand now made his sudden and unexpected appearance, his attendants, the inhabitants of the city, and almost every one rejoiced. This was not the case with Bertalda; for although it might be quite a welcome event to others that he brought with him a wife of such exquisite loveliness, and Father Heilmann as a witness of their marriage, Bertalda could not but view the affair with grief and vexation. She had, in truth, become attached to the young knight with her whole soul ; and her mourning for his absence, or supposed death, had shown this more than she could now have wished.

But notwithstanding all this, she conducted herself like a wise maiden in circumstances of such delicacy, and lived on the most friendly terms with Undine, whom the whole city looked upon as a princess that Huldbrand had rescued in the forest from some evil enchantment. Whenever any one questioned either herself or her husband relative to surmises of this nature, they had wisdom enough to remain silent, or wit enough to evade the inquiries. The lips of Father Heilmann had been sealed in regard to idle gossip of every kind ; and besides, on Huldbrand's arrival, he had immediately returned to his cloister : so that people were obliged to rest contented with their own wild conjectures ; and even Bertalda herself ascertained nothing more of the truth than others.

For the rest, Undine daily felt more love for the fair maiden. " We must have been before acquainted with each other," she often used to say to her, " or else there must be

some mysterious connection between us, for it is incredible that any one so perfectly without cause—I mean, without some deep and secret cause—should be so fondly attached to another as I have been to you from the first moment of our meeting."

And even Bertalda could not deny that she felt a confiding impulse, an attraction of tenderness toward Undine, much as she deemed this fortunate rival the cause of her bitterest disappointment. Under the influence of this mutual regard, they found means to persuade, the one her foster-parents, and the other her husband, to defer the day of separation to a period more and more remote ; nay, more, they had already begun to talk of a plan for Bertalda's accompanying Undine to Castle Ringstetten, near one of the sources of the Danube.

Once on a fine evening they happened to be talking over their scheme just as they passed the high trees that bordered the public walk. The young married pair, though it was somewhat late, had called upon Bertalda to invite her to share their enjoyment ; and all three proceeded familiarly up and down beneath the dark blue heaven, not seldom interrupted in their converse by the admiration which they could not but bestow upon the magnificent fountain in the middle of the square, and upon the wonderful rush and shooting upward of its waters. All was sweet and soothing to their minds. Among the shadows of the trees stole in glimmerings of light from the adjacent houses. A low murmur as of children at play, and of other persons who were enjoying their walk, floated around them—they were so alone, and yet sharing so much of social happiness in the bright and stirring world, that whatever had appeared rough by day now became smooth of its own accord. All the three friends could no longer see the slightest cause for hesitation in regard to Bertalda's taking the journey.

At that instant, while they were just fixing the day of their departure, a tall man approached them from the middle of the square, bowed respectfully to the company, and spoke something in the young bride's ear. Though displeased with the interruption and its cause, she walked aside a few steps with the stranger; and both began to whisper, as it seemed, in a foreign tongue. Huldbrand thought he recognized the strange man of the forest, and he gazed upon him so fixedly, that he neither heard nor answered the astonished inquiries of Bertalda. All at once Undine clapped her hands with delight, and turned back from the stranger, laughing: he, frequently shaking his head, retired with a hasty step and discontented air, and descended into the fountain. Huldbrand now felt perfectly certain that his conjecture was correct. But Bertalda asked:

"What, then, dear Undine, did the master of the fountain wish to say to you?"

Undine laughed within herself, and made answer: "The day after to-morrow, my dear child, when the anniversary of your name-day returns, you shall be informed." And this was all she could be prevailed upon to disclose. She merely asked Bertalda to dinner on the appointed day, and requested her to invite her foster-parents; and soon afterwards they separated.

"Kühleborn?" said Huldbrand to his lovely wife, with an inward shudder when they had taken leave of Bertalda, and were now going home through the darkening streets.

"Yes, it was he," answered Undine; "and he would have wearied me with his foolish warnings. But, in the midst, quite contrary to his intentions, he delighted me with a most welcome piece of news. If you, my dear lord and husband, wish me to acquaint you with it now, you need only command me, and I will freely and from my heart tell you all without reserve. But would you confer upon

your Undine a very, very great pleasure, wait till the day after to-morrow, and then you too shall have your share of the surprise."

The knight was quite willing to gratify his wife in what she had asked so sweetly. And even as she was falling asleep, she murmured to herself, with a smile: "How she will rejoice and be astonished at what her master of the fountain has told me!—dear, dear Bertalda!"

VI
CHAPTER

THE company were sitting at dinner. Bertalda, adorned with jewels and flowers without number, the presents of her foster-parents and friends, and looking like some goddess of spring, sat beside Undine and Huldbrand at the head of the table. When the sumptuous repast was ended, and the dessert was placed before them, permission was given that the doors should be left open: this was in accordance with the good old custom in Germany, that the common people might see and rejoice in the festivity of their superiors. Among these spectators the servants carried round cake and wine.

Huldbrand and Bertalda waited with secret impatience for the promised explanation, and hardly moved their eyes from

Undine. But she still continued silent, and merely smiled to herself with secret and heartfelt satisfaction. All who were made acquainted with the promise she had given could perceive that she was every moment on the point of revealing a happy secret ; and yet, as children sometimes delay tasting their choicest dainties, she still withheld the communication. Bertalda and Huldbrand shared the same delightful feeling, while in anxious hope they were expecting the unknown disclosure which they were to receive from the lips of their friend.

At this moment several of the company pressed Undine to sing. This she seemed pleased at ; and ordering her lute to be brought, she sang the following words :—

"Morning so bright,
Wild-flowers so gay,
Where high grass so dewy
Crowns the wavy lake's border.

On the meadow's verdant bosom
What glimmers there so white?
Have wreaths of snowy blossoms,
Soft-floating, fallen from heaven?

Ah, see ! a tender infant !—
It plays with flowers, unwittingly ;
It strives to grasp morn's golden beams.
O where, sweet stranger, where's your home?
Afar from unknown shores
The waves have wafted hither
This helpless little one.

Nay, clasp not, tender darling,
With tiny hand the flowers !
No hand returns the pressure,
The flowers are strange and mute.

They clothe themselves in beauty,
They breathe a rich perfume :
But cannot fold around you
A mother's loving arms ;—
Far, far away that mother's fond embrace.

Life's early dawn just opening faint,
Your eye yet beaming heaven's own smile,
So soon your tenderest guardians gone;
Severe, poor child, your fate,—
All, all to you unknown.

A noble duke has crossed the mead,
And near you checked his steed's career:
Wonder and pity touch his heart;
With knowledge high, and manners pure,
He rears you,—makes his castle home your own.

How great, how infinite your gain!
Of all the land you bloom the loveliest;
Yet, ah! the priceless blessing,
The bliss of parents' fondness,
You left on strands unknown!"

Undine let fall her lute with a melancholy smile. The eyes of Bertalda's noble foster-parents were filled with tears.

"Ah yes, it was so—such *was* the morning on which I found you, poor orphan!" cried the duke, with deep emotion; "the beautiful singer is certainly right: still

'The priceless blessing,
The bliss of parents' fondness,'

it was beyond our power to give you."

"But we must hear, also, what happened to the poor parents," said Undine, as she struck the chords, and sung:—

"Through her chambers roams the mother
Searching, searching everywhere;
Seeks, and knows not what, with yearning,
Childless house still finding there.

Childless house!—O sound of anguish!
She alone the anguish knows,
There by day who led her dear one,
There who rocked its night-repose,

Beechen buds again are swelling,
Sunshine warms again the shore ;
Ah, fond mother, cease your searching !
Comes the loved and lost no more.

Then when airs of eve are fresh'ning,
Home the father wends his way,
While with smiles his woe he's veiling,
Gushing tears his heart betray.

Well he knows, within his dwelling,
Still as death he'll find the gloom,
Only hear the mother moaning,—
No sweet babe to *smile* him home."

"O, tell me, in the name of Heaven tell me, Undine, where are my parents?" cried the weeping Bertalda. "You certainly know ; you must have discovered them, you wonderful being ; for otherwise you would never have thus torn my heart. Can they be already here? May I believe it possible?" Her eye glanced rapidly over the brilliant company, and rested upon a lady of high rank who was sitting next to her foster-father.

Then, bending her head, Undine beckoned toward the door, while her eyes overflowed with the sweetest emotion. "Where, then, are the poor parents waiting?" she asked ; and the old fisherman, hesitating, advanced with his wife from the crowd of spectators. They looked inquiringly, now at Undine, and now at the beautiful lady who was said to be their daughter.

"It is she! it is she there before you!" exclaimed the restorer of their child, her voice half choked with rapture. And both the aged parents embraced their recovered daughter, weeping aloud and praising God.

But, terrified and indignant, Bertalda tore herself from their arms. Such a discovery was too much for her proud spirit to bear, especially at the moment when she had doubtless expected to see her former splendour increased,

and when hope was picturing to her nothing less brilliant than a royal canopy and a crown. It seemed to her as if her rival had contrived all this on purpose to humble her before Huldbrand and the whole world. She reproached Undine; she reviled the old people; and even such offensive words as "deceiver, bribed and perjured impostors," burst from her lips.

The aged wife of the fisherman then said to herself, in a low voice: "Ah, my God, she has become wicked! and yet I feel in my heart that she is my child."

The old fisherman had meanwhile folded his hands, and offered up a silent prayer that she might *not* be his daughter.

Undine, faint and pale as death, turned from the parents to Bertalda, from Bertalda to the parents. She was suddenly cast down from all that heaven of happiness in which she had been dreaming, and plunged into an agony of terror and disappointment, which she had never known even in dreams.

"Have you, then, a soul? Have you indeed a soul, Bertalda?" she cried again and again to her angry friend, as if with vehement effort she would arouse her from a sudden delirium or some distracting dream of night, and restore her to recollection.

But when Bertalda became every moment only more and more enraged—when the disappointed parents began to weep aloud—and the company, with much warmth of dispute, were espousing opposite sides—she begged, with such earnestness and dignity, for the liberty of speaking in this her husband's hall, that all around her were in an instant hushed to silence. She then advanced to the upper end of the table, where, both humbled and haughty, Bertalda had seated herself, and, while every eye was fastened upon her, spoke in the following manner:—

"My friends, you appear dissatisfied and disturbed; and

you are interrupting, with your strife, a festivity I had hoped would bring joy to you and to me. Ah! I knew nothing of your heartless ways of thinking; and never shall I understand them. I am not to blame for the mischief this disclosure has done. Believe me, little as you may imagine this to be the case, it is wholly owing to yourselves. One word more, therefore, is all I have to add; but this is one that must be spoken:—I have uttered nothing but truth. Of the certainty of the fact, I give you the strongest assurance. No other proof can I or will I produce, but this I will affirm in the presence of God. The person who gave me this information was the very same who decoyed the infant Bertalda into the water, and who, after thus taking her from her parents, placed her on the green grass of the meadow, where he knew the duke was to pass."

"She is an enchantress!" cried Bertalda; "a witch, that has intercourse with evil spirits. She acknowledges it herself."

"Never! I deny it!" replied Undine, while a whole heaven of innocence and truth beamed from her eyes. "I am no witch; look upon me, and say if I am."

"Then she utters both falsehood and folly," cried Bertalda; "and she is unable to prove that I am the child of these low people. My noble parents, I entreat you to take me from this company, and out of this city, where they do nothing but shame me."

But the aged duke, a man of honourable feeling, remained unmoved; and his wife remarked: "We must thoroughly examine into this matter. God forbid that we should move a step from this hall before we do so."

Then the aged wife of the fisherman drew near, made a low obeisance to the duchess and said: "Noble and pious lady, you have opened my heart. Permit me to tell you, that if this evil-disposed maiden is my daughter, she has a

mark like a violet between her shoulders, and another of the same kind on the instep of her left foot. If she will only consent to go out of the hall with me——"

"I will not consent to uncover myself before the peasant woman," interrupted Bertalda, haughtily turning her back upon her.

"But before me you certainly will," replied the duchess gravely. "You will follow me into that room, maiden; and the old woman shall go with us."

The three disappeared, and the rest continued where they were, in breathless expectation. In a few minutes the females returned—Bertalda pale as death; and the duchess said: "Justice must be done; I therefore declare that our lady hostess has spoken exact truth. Bertalda is the fisherman's daughter; no further proof is required; and this is all of which, on the present occasion, you need to be informed."

The princely pair went out with their adopted daughter; the fisherman, at a sign from the duke, followed them with his wife. The other guests retired in silence, or suppressing their murmurs; while Undine sank weeping into the arms of Huldbrand.

The lord of Ringstetten would certainly have been more gratified, had the events of this day been different; but even such as they now were, he could by no means look upon them as unwelcome, since his lovely wife had shown herself so full of goodness, sweetness, and kindliness.

"If I have given her a soul," he could not help saying to himself, "I have assuredly given her a better one than my own;" and now he only thought of soothing and comforting his weeping wife, and of removing her even so early as the morrow from a place which, after this cross accident, could not fail to be distasteful to her. Yet it is certain that the opinion of the public concerning her was not changed. As something extraordinary had long before been expected

of her, the mysterious discovery of Bertalda's parentage had occasioned little or no surprise; and every one who became acquainted with Bertalda's story, and with the violence of her behaviour on that occasion, was only disgusted and set against her. Of this state of things, however, the knight and his lady were as yet ignorant; besides, whether the public condemned Bertalda or herself, the one view of the affair would have been as distressing to Undine as the other; and thus they came to the conclusion that the wisest course they could take, was to leave behind them the walls of the old city with all the speed in their power.

With the earliest beams of morning, a brilliant carriage for Undine drove up to the door of the inn; the horses of Huldbrand and his attendants stood near, stamping the pavement, impatient to proceed. The knight was leading his beautiful wife from the door, when a fisher-girl came up and met them in the way.

"We have no need of your fish," said Huldbrand, accosting her; "we are this moment setting out on a journey."

Upon this the fisher-girl began to weep bitterly; and then it was that the young couple first perceived it was Bertalda. They immediately returned with her to their apartment, when she informed them that, owing to her unfeeling and violent conduct of the preceding day, the duke and duchess had been so displeased with her, as entirely to withdraw from her their protection, though not before giving her a generous portion. The fisherman, too, had received a handsome gift, and had, the evening before, set out with his wife for his peninsula.

"I would have gone with them," she pursued, "but the old fisherman, who is said to be my father——"

"He is, in truth, your father, Bertalda," said Undine, interrupting her. "See, the stranger whom you took for the master of the water-works gave me all the particulars.

He wished to dissuade me from taking you with me to Castle Ringstetten, and therefore disclosed to me the whole mystery."

"Well then," continued Bertalda, "my father—if it must needs be so—my father said: 'I will not take you with me until you are changed. If you will venture to come to us alone through the ill-omened forest, that shall be a proof of your having some regard for us. But come not to me as a lady; come merely as a fisher-girl.' I do as he bade me, for since I am abandoned by all the world, I will live and die in solitude, a poor fisher-girl, with parents equally poor. The forest, indeed, appears very terrible to me. Horrible spectres make it their haunt, and I am so fearful. But how can I help it? I have only come here at this early hour to beg the noble lady of Ringstetten to pardon my unbecoming behaviour of yesterday. Sweet lady, I have the fullest persuasion that you meant to do me a kindness, but you were not aware how severely you would wound me; and then, in my agony and surprise, so many rash and frantic expressions burst from my lips. Forgive me, ah, forgive me! I am in truth so unhappy, already. Only consider what I was but yesterday morning, what I was even at the beginning of your yesterday's festival, and what I am to-day!"

Her words now became inarticulate, lost in a passionate flow of tears, while Undine, bitterly weeping with her, fell upon her neck. So powerful was her emotion, that it was a long time before she could utter a word. At length she said:

"You shall still go with us to Ringstetten; all shall remain just as we lately arranged it; but say 'thou' to me again, and do not call me 'noble lady' any more. Consider, we were changed for each other when we were children; even then we were united by a like fate, and we will strengthen this union with such close affection as no

human power shall dissolve. Only first of all you must go with us to Ringstetten. How we shall share all things as sisters, we can talk of after we arrive."

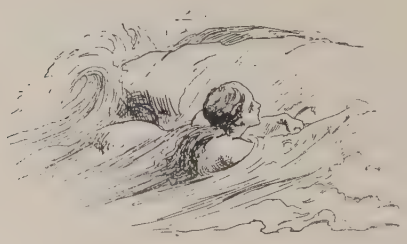
Bertalda looked up to Huldbrand with timid inquiry. He pitied her in her affliction, took her hand, and begged her tenderly to entrust herself to him and his wife.

"We will send a message to your parents," continued he, "giving them the reason why you have not come;"—and he would have added more about his worthy friends of the peninsula, when, perceiving that Bertalda shrank in distress at the mention of them, he refrained. He took her under the arm, lifted her first into the carriage, then Undine, and was soon riding blithely beside them; so persevering was he, too, in urging forward their driver, that in a short time they had left behind them the limits of the city, and a crowd of painful recollections; and now the ladies could take delight in the beautiful country which their progress was continually presenting.

After a journey of some days, they arrived, on a fine evening, at Castle Ringstetten. The young knight being much engaged with the overseers and menials of his establishment, Undine and Bertalda were left alone. They took a walk upon the high rampart of the fortress, and were charmed with the delightful landscape which the fertile Suabia spread around them. While they were viewing the scene, a tall man drew near, who greeted them with respectful civility, and who seemed to Bertalda much to resemble the director of the city fountain. Still less was the resemblance to be mistaken, when Undine, indignant at his intrusion, waved him off with an air of menace; while he, shaking his head, retreated with rapid strides, as he had formerly done, then glided among the trees of a neighbouring grove and disappeared.

"Do not be terrified, Bertalda," said Undine; "the hateful master of the fountain shall do you no harm this

time." And then she related to her the particulars of her history, and who she was herself—how Bertalda had been taken away from the people of the peninsula, and Undine left in her place. This relation at first filled the young maiden with amazement and alarm; she imagined her friend must be seized with a sudden madness. But from the consistency of her story, she became more and more convinced that all was true, it so well agreed with former occurrences, and still more convinced from that inward feeling with which truth never fails to make itself known to us. She could not but view it as an extraordinary circumstance that she was herself now living, as it were, in the midst of one of those wild tales which she had formerly heard related. She gazed upon Undine with reverence, but could not keep from a shuddering feeling which seemed to come between her and her friend; and she could not but wonder when the knight, at their evening repast, showed himself so kind and full of love towards a being who appeared to her, after the discoveries just made, more to resemble a phantom of the spirit-world than one of the human race.



VII
CHAPTER

THE writer of this tale, both because it moves his own heart and he wishes it to move that of others, asks a favour of you, dear reader. Forgive him if he passes over a considerable space of time in a few words, and only tells you generally what therein happened. He knows well that it might be unfolded skilfully, and step by step, how Huldbrand's heart began to turn from Undine and towards Bertalda—how Bertalda met the young knight with ardent love, and how they both looked upon the poor wife as a mysterious being, more to be dreaded than pitied—how Undine wept, and her tears stung the conscience of her husband, without recalling his former love; so that though at times he showed kindness to her, a cold shudder soon forced him to turn from her to his fellow-mortal Bertalda;—all this, the writer knows, might have been drawn out fully,

and perhaps it ought to have been. But it would have made him too sad; for he has witnessed such things, and shrinks from recalling even their shadow. Thou knowest, probably, the like feeling, dear reader; for it is the lot of mortal man. Happy art thou if thou hast received the injury, not inflicted it; for in this case it is more blessed to receive than to give. Then only a soft sorrow at such a recollection passes through thy heart, and perhaps a quiet tear trickles down thy cheek over the faded flowers in which thou once so heartily rejoiced. This is enough: we will not pierce our hearts with a thousand separate stings, but only bear in mind that all happened as I just now said.

Poor Undine was greatly troubled; and the other two were very far from being happy. Bertalda in particular, whenever she was in the slightest degree opposed in her wishes, attributed the cause to the jealousy and oppression of the injured wife. She was therefore daily in the habit of showing a haughty and imperious demeanour, to which Undine yielded with a sad submission; and which was generally encouraged strongly by the now blinded Huldbrand.

What disturbed the inmates of the castle still more, was the endless variety of wonderful apparitions which assailed Huldbrand and Bertalda in the vaulted passages of the building, and of which nothing had ever been heard before within the memory of man. The tall white man, in whom Huldbrand but too plainly recognized Undine's uncle Kühleborn, and Bertalda the spectral master of the water-works, often passed before them with threatening aspect and gestures; more especially, however, before Bertalda, so that, through terror, she had several times already fallen sick, and had, in consequence, frequently thought of quitting the castle. Yet partly because Huldbrand was but too dear to her, and she trusted to her innocence, since no words of love had passed between them, and partly also

because she knew not whither to direct her steps, she lingered where she was.

The old fisherman, on receiving the message from the lord of Ringstetten that Bertalda was his guest, returned answer in some lines almost too illegible to be deciphered, but still the best his advanced life and long disuse of writing permitted him to form.

"I have now become," he wrote, "a poor old widower, for my beloved and faithful wife is dead. But lonely as I now sit in my cottage, I prefer Bertalda's remaining where she is, to her living with me. Only let her do nothing to hurt my dear Undine, else she will have my curse."

The last words of this letter Bertalda flung to the winds; but the permission to remain from home, which her father had granted her, she remembered and clung to—just as we are all of us wont to do in similar circumstances.

One day, a few moments after Huldbrand had ridden out, Undine called together the domestics of the family, and ordered them to bring a large stone, and carefully to cover with it a magnificent fountain, that was situated in the middle of the castle court. The servants objected that it would oblige them to bring water from the valley below. Undine smiled sadly.

"I am sorry, my friends," replied she, "to increase your labour; I would rather bring up the water-vessels myself: but this fountain must indeed be closed. Believe me when I say that it must be done, and that only by doing it we can avoid a greater evil."

The domestics were all rejoiced to gratify their gentle mistress; and making no further inquiry, they seized the enormous stone. While they were raising it in their hands, and were now on the point of adjusting it over the fountain, Bertalda came running to the place, and cried, with an air of command, that they must stop; that the water she used, so improving to her complexion, was brought from this

fountain, and that she would by no means allow it to be closed.

This time, however, Undine, while she showed her usual gentleness, showed more than her usual resolution: she said it belonged to her, as mistress of the house, to direct the household according to her best judgment; and that she was accountable in this to no one but her lord and husband.

"See, O pray see," exclaimed the dissatisfied and indignant Bertalda, "how the beautiful water is curling and curving, winding and waving there, as if disturbed at being shut out from the bright sunshine, and from the cheerful view of the human countenance, for whose mirror it was created."

In truth the water of the fountain was agitated, and foaming and hissing in a surprising manner; it seemed as if there were something within possessing life and will, that was struggling to free itself from confinement. But Undine only the more earnestly urged the accomplishment of her commands. This earnestness was scarcely required. The servants of the castle were as happy in obeying their gentle lady, as in opposing the haughty spirit of Bertalda; and however the latter might scold and threaten, still the stone was in a few minutes lying firm over the opening of the fountain. Undine leaned thoughtfully over it, and wrote with her beautiful fingers on the flat surface. She must, however, have had something very sharp and corrosive in her hand, for when she retired, and the domestics went up to examine the stone, they discovered various strange characters upon it, which none of them had seen there before.

When the knight returned home, toward evening, Bertalda received him with tears, and complaints of Undine's conduct. He cast a severe glance of reproach at his poor wife, and she looked down in distress; yet she said, very calmly:

"My lord and husband, you never reprove even a bond-slave before you hear his defence; how much less, then, your wedded wife!"

"Speak! what moved you to this singular conduct?" said the knight with a gloomy countenance.

"I could wish to tell you when we are entirely alone," said Undine, with a sigh.

"You can tell me equally well in the presence of Bertalda," he replied.

"Yes, if you command me," said Undine; "but do not command me—pray, pray do not!"

She looked so humble, affectionate, and obedient, that the heart of the knight was touched and softened, as if it felt the influence of a ray from better times. He kindly took her arm within his, and led her to his apartment, where she spoke as follows:

"You already know something, my beloved lord, of Kühleborn, my evil-disposed uncle, and have often felt displeasure at meeting him in the passages of this castle. Several times has he terrified Bertalda even to swooning. He does this because he possesses no soul, being a mere elemental mirror of the outward world, while of the world within he can give no reflection. Then, too, he sometimes observes that you are displeased with me, that in my childish weakness I weep at this, and that Bertalda, it may be, laughs at the same moment. Hence it is that he imagines all is wrong with us, and in various ways mixes with our circle unbidden. What do I gain by reproving him, by showing displeasure, and sending him away? He does not believe a word I say. His poor nature has no idea that the joys and sorrows of love have so sweet a resemblance, and are so intimately connected that no power on earth is able to separate them. A smile shines in the midst of tears, and a smile calls forth tears from their dwelling-place."

She looked up at Huldbrand, smiling and weeping, and he again felt within his heart all the magic of his former love. She perceived it, and pressed him more tenderly to her, while with tears of joy she went on thus :

" When the disturber of our peace would not be dismissed with words, I was obliged to shut the door upon him ; and the only entrance by which he has access to us is that fountain. His connection with the other water-spirits here in this region is cut off by the valleys that border upon us ; and his kingdom first commences farther off on the Danube, in whose tributary streams some of his good friends have their abode. For this reason I caused the stone to be placed over the opening of the fountain, and inscribed characters upon it, which baffle all the efforts of my suspicious uncle ; so that he now has no power of intruding either upon you or me, or Bertalda. Human beings, it is true, notwithstanding the characters I have inscribed there, are able to raise the stone without any extraordinary trouble ; there is nothing to prevent them. If you choose, therefore, remove it, according to Bertalda's desire ; but she assuredly knows not what she asks. The rude Kühleborn looks with peculiar ill-will upon her ; and should those things come to pass that he has predicted to me, and which may happen without your meaning any evil, ah ! dearest, even you yourself would be exposed to peril."

Huldbrand felt the generosity of his gentle wife in the depth of his heart, since she had been so active in confining her formidable defender, and even at the very moment she was reproached for it by Bertalda. He pressed her in his arms with the tenderest affection, and said with emotion :

" The stone shall remain unmoved ; all remains, and ever shall remain, just as you choose to have it, my sweetest Undine ! "

At these long-withheld expressions of tenderness, she returned his caresses with lowly delight, and at length said :

" My dearest husband, since you are so kind and indulgent to-day, may I venture to ask a favour of you? See now, it is with you as with summer. Even amid its highest splendour, summer puts on the flaming and thundering crown of glorious tempests, in which it strongly resembles a king and god on earth. You, too, are sometimes terrible in your rebukes; your eyes flash lightning, while thunder resounds in your voice; and although this may be quite becoming to you, I in my folly cannot but sometimes weep at it. But never, I entreat you, behave thus toward me on a river, or even when we are near any water. For if you should, my relations would acquire a right over me. They would inexorably tear me from you in their fury, because they would conceive that one of their race was injured; and I should be compelled, as long as I lived, to dwell below in the crystal palaces, and never dare to ascend to you again; or should *they send* me up to you!—O God! that would be far worse still. No, no, my beloved husband; let it not come to that, if your poor Undine is dear to you."

He solemnly promised to do as she desired, and, inexpressibly happy and full of affection, the married pair returned from the apartment. At this very moment Bertalda came with some work-people whom she had meanwhile ordered to attend her, and said with a fretful air, which she had assumed of late:

" Well, now the secret consultation is at an end, the stone may be removed. Go out, workmen, and see to it."

The knight, however, highly resenting her impertinence, said, in brief and very decisive terms: " The stone remains where it is!" He reproved Bertalda also for the vehemence that she had shown towards his wife. Whereupon the workmen, smiling with secret satisfaction, withdrew; while Bertalda, pale with rage, hurried away to her room.

When the hour of supper came, Bertalda was waited for in vain. They sent for her; but the domestic found her

apartments empty, and brought back with him only a sealed letter, addressed to the knight. He opened it in alarm, and read :

" I feel with shame that I am only the daughter of a poor fisherman. That I for one moment forgot this, I will make expiation in the miserable hut of my parents. Farewell to you and your beautiful wife ! "

Undine was troubled at heart. With eagerness she entreated Huldbrand to hasten after their friend, who had flown, and bring her back with him. Alas ! she had no occasion to urge him. His passion for Bertalda again burst forth with vehemence. He hurried round the castle, inquiring whether any one had seen which way the fair fugitive had gone. He could gain no information ; and was already in the court on his horse, determining to take at a venture the road by which he had conducted Bertalda to the castle, when there appeared a page, who assured him that he had met the lady on the path to the Black Valley. Swift as an arrow, the knight sprang through the gate in the direction pointed out, without hearing Undine's voice of agony, as she cried after him from the window :

" To the Black Valley ? Oh, not there ! Huldbrand, not there ! Or if you will go, for Heaven's sake take me with you ! "

But when she perceived that all her calling was of no avail, she ordered her white palfrey to be instantly saddled, and followed the knight, without permitting a single servant to accompany her.

The Black Valley lies secluded far among the mountains. What its present name may be I am unable to say. At the time of which I am speaking, the country-people gave it this appellation from the deep obscurity produced by the shadows of lofty trees, more especially by a crowded growth of firs that covered this region of moorland. Even the brook, which bubbled between the rocks, assumed the same

dark hue, and showed nothing of that cheerful aspect which streams are wont to wear that have the blue sky immediately over them.

It was now the dusk of evening ; and between the heights it had become extremely wild and gloomy. The knight, in great anxiety, skirted the border of the brook. He was at one time fearful that, by delay, he should allow the fugitive to advance too far before him ; and then again, in his too eager rapidity, he was afraid he might somewhere overlook and pass by her, should she be desirous of concealing herself from his search. He had in the meantime penetrated pretty far into the valley, and might hope soon to overtake the maiden, provided he were pursuing the right track. The fear, indeed, that he might not as yet have gained it, made his heart beat with more and more of anxiety. In the stormy night which was now approaching, and which always fell more fearfully over this valley, where would the delicate Bertalda shelter herself, should he fail to find her? At last, while these thoughts were darting across his mind, he saw something white glimmer through the branches on the ascent of the mountain. He thought he recognized Bertalda's robe ; and he directed his course towards it. But his horse refused to go forward ; he reared with a fury so uncontrollable, and his master was so unwilling to lose a moment, that (especially as he saw the thickets were altogether impassable on horseback) he dismounted, and, having fastened his snorting steed to an elm, worked his way with caution through the matted underwood. The branches, moistened by the cold drops of the evening dew, struck against his forehead and cheeks ; distant thunder muttered from the further side of the mountains ; and everything put on so strange an appearance, that he began to feel a dread of the white figure, which now lay at a short distance from him upon the ground. Still, he could see distinctly that it was a female, either asleep or

in a swoon, and dressed in long white garments such as Bertalda had worn the past day. Approaching quite near to her, he made a rustling with the branches and a ringing with his sword; but she did not move.

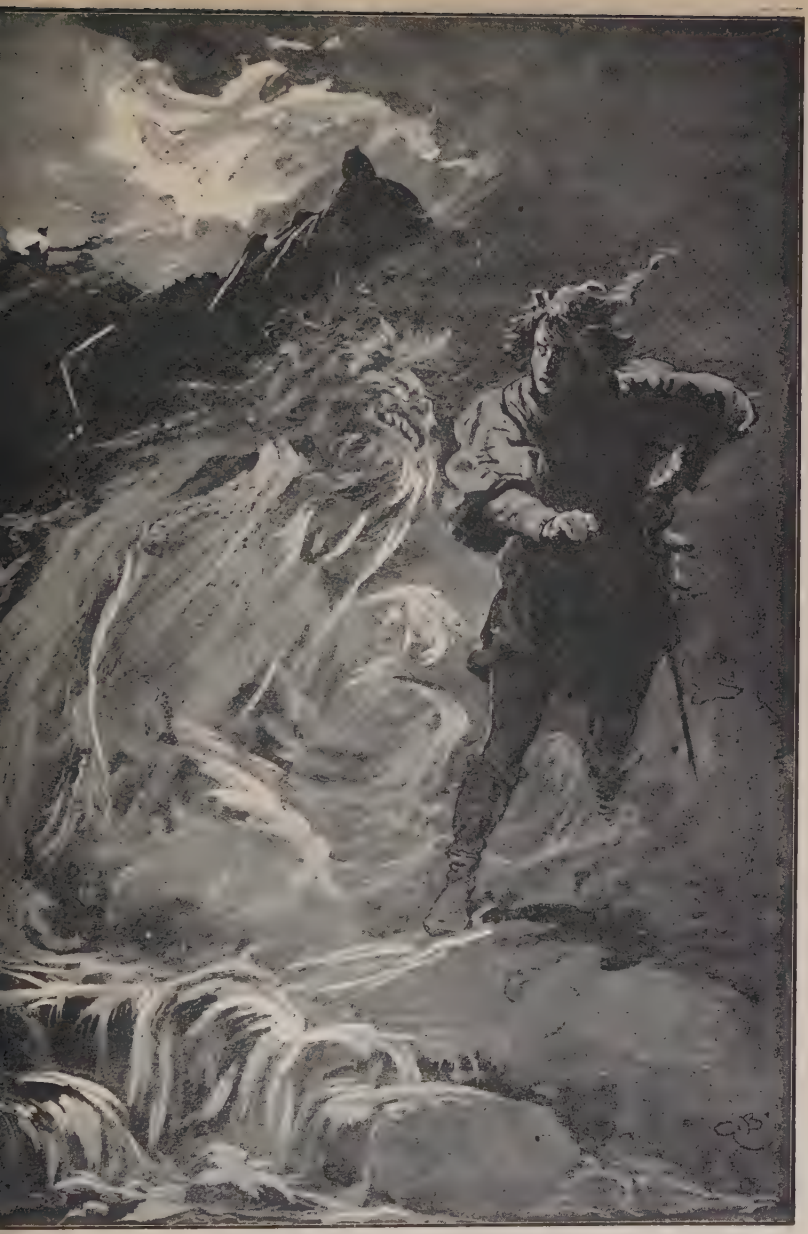
"Bertalda!" he cried, at first low, then louder and louder; yet she heard him not. At last, when he uttered the dear name with an energy yet more powerful, a hollow echo from the mountain-summits around the valley returned the deadened sound, "Bertalda!" Still the sleeper continued insensible. He stooped down; but the duskiness of the valley, and the obscurity of twilight would not allow him to distinguish her features. While, with painful uncertainty, he was bending over her, a flash of lightning suddenly shot across the valley. By this stream of light he saw a frightfully distorted visage close to his own, and a hoarse voice reached his ear:

"You enamoured swain, give me a kiss!" Huldbrand sprang upon his feet with a cry of horror, and the hideous figure rose with him.

"Go home!" it cried, with a deep murmur: "the fiends are abroad. Go home! or I have you!" And it stretched towards him its long white arms.

"Malicious Kühleborn!" exclaimed the knight, with restored energy; "if Kühleborn you are, what business have you here?—what's your will, you goblin? There, take your kiss!" And in fury he struck his sword at the form. But it vanished like vapour; and a rush of water, which wetted him through and through, left him in no doubt with what foe he had been engaged.

"He wishes to frighten me back from my pursuit of Bertalda," said he to himself. "He imagines that I shall be terrified at his senseless tricks, and resign the poor distressed maiden to his power, so that he can wreak his vengeance upon her at will. But that he shall not, weak spirit of the flood! What the heart of man can do, when



"Go home! or I have you!"—*p.* 242.

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it exerts the full force of its will and of its noblest powers, the poor goblin cannot fathom."

He felt the truth of his words, and that they had inspired his heart with fresh courage. Fortune, too, appeared to favour him; for, before reaching his fastened steed, he distinctly heard the voice of Bertalda, weeping not far before him, amid the roar of the thunder and the tempest, which every moment increased. He flew swiftly towards the sound, and found the trembling maiden, just as she was attempting to climb the steep, hoping to escape from the dreadful darkness of this valley. He drew near her with expressions of love; and bold and proud as her resolution had so lately been, she now felt nothing but joy that the man whom she so passionately loved should rescue her from this frightful solitude, and thus call her back to the joyful life in the castle. She followed almost unresisting, but so spent with fatigue, that the knight was glad to bring her to his horse, which he now hastily unfastened from the elm, in order to lift the fair wanderer upon him, and then to lead him carefully by the reins through the uncertain shades of the valley.

But, owing to the wild apparition of Kühleborn, the horse had become wholly unmanageable. Rearing and wildly snorting as he was, the knight must have used uncommon effort to mount the beast himself; to place the trembling Bertalda upon him was impossible. They were compelled, therefore, to return home on foot. While with one hand the knight drew the steed after him by the bridle, he supported the tottering Bertalda with the other. She exerted all the strength in her power in order to escape speedily from this vale of terrors. But weariness weighed her down like lead; and all her limbs trembled, partly in consequence of what she had suffered from the extreme terror which Kühleborn had already caused her, and partly from her present fear at the roar of the tempest and thunder amid the mountain forest.

At last she slid from the arm of the knight; and sinking upon the moss, she said: "Only let me lie here, my noble lord. I suffer the punishment due to my folly; and I must perish here through faintness and dismay."

"Never, gentle lady, will I leave you," cried Huldbrand, vainly trying to restrain the furious animal he was leading, for the horse was all in a foam, and began to chafe more ungovernably than before, till the knight was glad to keep him at such a distance from the exhausted maiden as to save her from a new alarm. But hardly had he withdrawn five steps with the frantic steed when she began to call after him in the most sorrowful accents, fearful that he would actually leave her in this horrible wilderness. He was at a loss what course to take. He would gladly have given the enraged beast his liberty; he would have let him rush away amid the night and exhaust his fury, had he not feared that in this narrow defile his iron-shod hoofs might come thundering over the very spot where Bertalda lay.

In this extreme peril and embarrassment he heard with delight the rumbling wheels of a waggon as it came slowly descending the stony way behind them. He called out for help; answer was returned in the deep voice of a man, bidding them have patience, but promising assistance; and two grey horses soon after shone through the bushes, and near them their driver in the white frock of a carter; and next appeared a great sheet of white linen, with which the goods he seemed to be conveying were covered. The greys, in obedience to a shout from their master, stood still. He came up to the knight, and aided him in checking the fury of the foaming charger.

"I know well enough," said he, "what is the matter with the brute. The first time I travelled this way my horses were just as wilful and headstrong as yours. The reason is, there is a water-spirit haunts this valley—and a wicked wight they say he is—who takes delight in mischief and

witcheries of this sort. But I have learned a charm; and if you will let me whisper it in your horse's ear, he will stand just as quiet as my silver greys there."

"Try your luck, then, and help us as quickly as possible!" said the impatient knight.

Upon this the waggoner drew down the head of the rearing courser close to his own, and spoke some words in his ear. The animal instantly stood still and subdued; only his quick panting and smoking sweat showed his recent violence.

Huldbrand had little time to inquire by what means this had been effected. He agreed with the man that he should take Bertalda in his waggon, where, as he said, a quantity of soft cotton was stowed, and he might in this way convey her to Castle Ringstetten. The knight could accompany them on horseback. But the horse appeared to be too much exhausted to carry his master so far. Seeing this, the man advised him to mount the waggon with Bertalda. The horse could be attached to it behind.

"It is down-hill," said he, "and the load for my greys will therefore be light."

The knight accepted his offer, and entered the waggon with Bertalda. The horse followed patiently after, while the waggoner, sturdy and attentive, walked beside them.

Amid the silence and deepening obscurity of the night, the tempest sounding more and more remote, in the comfortable feeling of their security, a confidential conversation arose between Huldbrand and Bertalda. He reproached her in the most flattering words for her resentful flight. She excused herself with humility and feeling; and from every tone of her voice it shone out, like a lamp guiding to the beloved through night and darkness, that Huldbrand was still dear to her. The knight felt the *sense* of her words rather than heard the words themselves, and answered simply to this sense.

Then the waggoner suddenly shouted, with a startling voice: "Up, my greys, up with your feet! Hey, now together!—show your spirit!—remember who you are!"

The knight bent over the side of the waggon, and saw that the horses had stepped into the midst of a foaming stream, and were, indeed, almost swimming, while the wheels of the waggon were rushing round and flashing like mill-wheels; and the waggoner had got on before, to avoid the swell of the flood.

"What sort of a road is this? It leads into the middle of the stream!" cried Huldbrand to his guide.

"Not at all, sir," returned he, with a laugh; "it is just the contrary. The stream is running in the middle of our road. Only look about you, and see how all is overflowed!"

The whole valley, in fact, was in commotion, as the waters, suddenly raised and visibly rising, swept over it.

"It is Kühleborn, that evil water-spirit, who wishes to drown us!" exclaimed the knight. "Have you no charm of protection against him, friend?"

"I have one," answered the waggoner; "but I cannot and must not make use of it before you know who I am."

"Is this a time for riddles?" cried the knight. "The flood is every moment rising higher; and what does it concern *me* to know who *you* are?"

"But mayhap it does concern you, though," said the guide; "for I am Kühleborn."

Thus speaking he thrust his head into the waggon, and laughed with a distorted visage. But the waggon remained a waggon no longer; the grey horses were horses no longer; all was transformed to foam—all sank into the waters that rushed and hissed around them; while the waggoner himself, rising in the form of a gigantic wave, dragged the vainly-struggling courser under the waters, then rose again huge as a liquid tower, swept over the heads of the floating pair, and was on the point of burying

All sank into the waters.—*p.* 248.

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them irrecoverably beneath it. Then the soft voice of Undine was heard through the uproar ; the moon emerged from the clouds ; and by its light Undine was seen on the heights above the valley. She rebuked, she threatened the floods below her. The menacing and tower-like billow vanished, muttering and murmuring ; the waters gently flowed away under the beams of the moon ; while Undine, like a hovering white dove, flew down from the hill, raised the knight and Bertalda, and bore them to a green spot, where, by her earnest efforts, she soon restored them and dispelled their terrors. She then assisted Bertalda to mount the white palfrey on which she had herself been borne to the valley ; and thus all three returned homeward to Castle Ringstetten.

VIII
CHAPTER

AFTER this last adventure they lived at the castle undisturbed and in peaceful enjoyment. The knight was more and more impressed with the heavenly goodness of his wife, which she had so nobly shown by her instant pursuit and by the rescue she had effected in the Black Valley, where the power of Kühleborn again commenced. Undine herself enjoyed that peace and security which never fails the soul as long as it knows distinctly that it is on the right path ; and besides, in the newly-awakened love and regard of her husband, a thousand gleams of hope and joy shone upon her.

Bertalda, on the other hand, showed herself grateful, humble, and timid, without taking to herself any merit for so doing. Whenever Huldbrand or Undine began to explain to her their reasons for covering the fountain, or their

adventures in the Black Valley, she would earnestly entreat them to spare her the recital, for the recollection of the fountain occasioned her too much shame, and that of the Black Valley too much terror. She learnt nothing more about either of them; and what would she have gained from more knowledge? Peace and joy had visibly taken up their abode at Castle Ringstetten. They enjoyed their present blessings in perfect security, and now imagined that life could produce nothing but pleasant flowers and fruits.

In this happiness winter came and passed away; and spring, with its foliage of tender green, and its heaven of softest blue, succeeded to gladden the hearts of the three inmates of the castle. The season was in harmony with their minds, and their minds imparted their own hues to the season. What wonder, then, that its storks and swallows inspired them also with a disposition to travel? On a bright morning, while they were wandering down to one of the sources of the Danube, Huldbrand spoke of the magnificence of this noble stream, how it continued swelling as it flowed through countries enriched by its waters, with what splendour Vienna rose and sparkled on its banks, and how it grew lovelier and more imposing throughout its progress.

"It must be glorious to trace its course down to Vienna!" Bertalda exclaimed, with warmth; but immediately resuming the humble and modest demeanour she had recently shown, she paused and blushed in silence.

This much moved Undine; and with the liveliest wish to gratify her friend, she said, "What hinders our taking this little voyage?"

Bertalda leapt up with delight, and the two friends at the same moment began painting this enchanting voyage on the Danube in the most brilliant colours. Huldbrand, too, agreed to the project with pleasure; only he once whispered, with something of alarm, in Undine's ear—

"But at that distance Kühleborn becomes possessed of his power again!"

"Let him come, let him come," she answered with a laugh; "I shall be there, and he dares do none of his mischief in my presence."

Thus was the last impediment removed. They prepared for the expedition, and soon set out upon it with lively spirits and the brightest hopes.

But be not surprised, O man, if events almost always happen very differently from what you expect. That malicious power which lies in ambush for our destruction delights to lull its chosen victim asleep with sweet songs and golden delusions; while, on the other hand, the messenger of heaven often strikes sharply at our door, to alarm and awaken us.

During the first days of their passage down the Danube they were unusually happy. The further they advanced upon the waters of this proud river, the views became more and more fair. But amid scenes otherwise most delicious, and from which they had promised themselves the purest delight, the stubborn Kühleborn, dropping all disguise, began to show his power of annoying them. He had no other means of doing this, indeed, than by tricks—for Undine often rebuked the swelling waves or the contrary winds, and then the insolence of the enemy was instantly humbled and subdued; but his attacks were renewed, and Undine's reproofs again became necessary, so that the pleasure of the fellow-travellers was completely destroyed. The boatmen, too, were continually whispering to one another in dismay, and eying their three superiors with distrust, while even the servants began more and more to form dismal surmises, and to watch their master and mistress with looks of suspicion.

Huldbrand often said in his own mind, "This comes when like marries not like—when a man forms an unnatural union with a sea-maiden." Excusing himself, as we all

love to do, he would add: "I did not, in fact, know that she *was* a maid of the sea. It is my misfortune that my steps are haunted and disturbed by the wild humours of her kindred, but it is not my crime."

By reflections like these, he felt himself in some measure strengthened; but, on the other hand, he felt the more ill-humour, almost dislike, towards Undine. He would look angrily at her, and the unhappy wife but too well understood his meaning. One day, grieved by this unkindness, as well as exhausted by her unremitted exertions to frustrate the artifices of Kühleborn, she toward evening fell into a deep slumber, rocked and soothed by the gentle motion of the bark. But hardly had she closed her eyes, when every person in the boat, in whatever direction he might look, saw the head of a man, frightful beyond imagination: each head rose out of the waves, not like that of a person swimming, but quite perpendicular, as if firmly fastened to the watery mirror, and yet moving on with the bark. Every one wished to show to his companion what terrified himself, and each perceived the same expression of horror on the face of the other, only hands and eyes were directed to a different quarter, as if to a point where the monster, half laughing and half threatening, rose opposite to each.

When, however, they wished to make one another understand the site, and all cried out, "Look, there!" "No, there!" the frightful heads all became visible to each, and the whole river around the boat swarmed with the most horrible faces. All raised a scream of terror at the sight, and Undine started from sleep. As she opened her eyes, the deformed visages disappeared. But Huldbrand was made furious by so many hideous visions. He would have burst out in wild imprecations, had not Undine with the meekest looks and gentlest tone of voice said—

"For God's sake, my husband, do not express displeasure against me here—we are on the water."

The knight was silent, and sat down absorbed in deep thought. Undine whispered in his ear, "Would it not be better, my love, to give up this foolish voyage, and return to Castle Ringstetten in peace?"

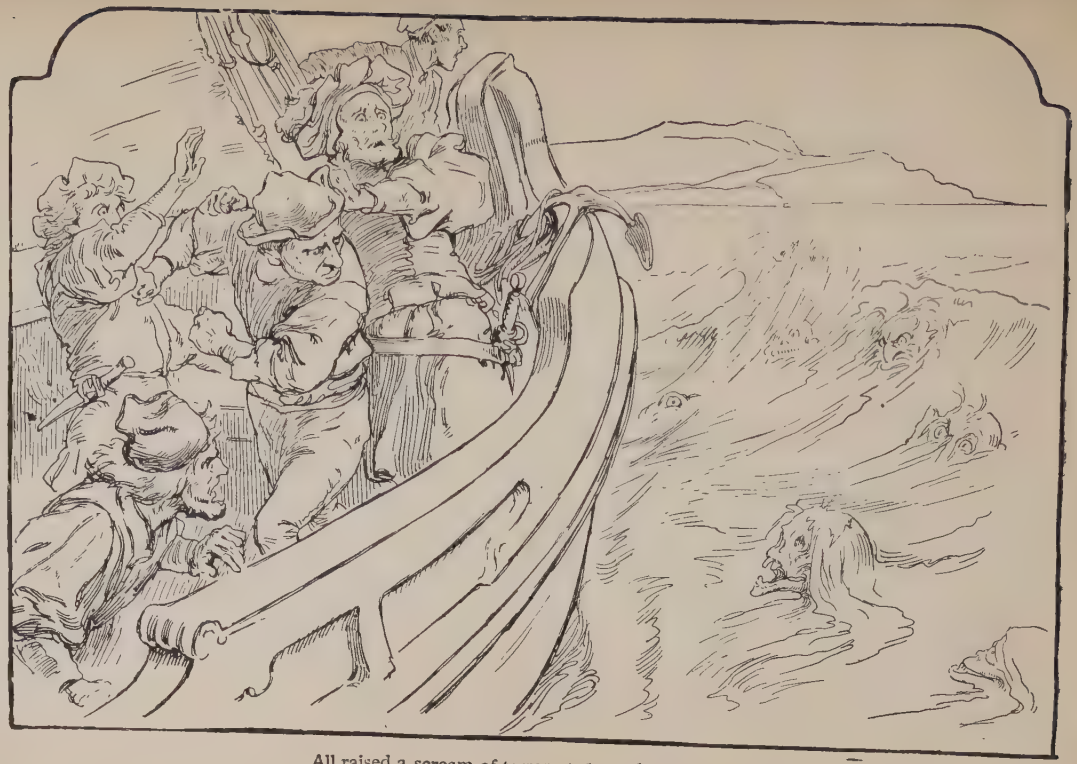
But Huldbrand murmured wrathfully: "So I must become a prisoner in my own castle, and not be allowed to breathe a moment but while the fountain is covered? Would to Heaven that your cursed kindred——"

Then Undine pressed her fair hand on his lips caressingly. He said no more; but in silence pondered on all that Undine had before said.

Bertalda, meanwhile, had given herself up to a crowd of thronging thoughts. Of Undine's origin she knew a good deal, but not the whole; and the terrible Kühleborn especially remained to her an awful, an impenetrable mystery—never, indeed, had she once heard his name. Musing upon these wondrous things, she unclasped, without being fully conscious of what she was doing, a golden necklace, which Huldbrand, on one of the preceding days of their passage, had bought for her of a travelling trader; and she was now letting it float in sport just over the surface of the stream, while in her dreamy mood she enjoyed the bright reflection it threw on the water, so clear beneath the glow of evening. That instant a huge hand flashed suddenly up from the Danube, seized the necklace in its grasp, and vanished with it beneath the flood. Bertalda shrieked aloud, and a scornful laugh came pealing up from the depth of the river.

The knight could now restrain his wrath no longer. He started up, poured forth a torrent of reproaches, heaped curses upon all who interfered with his friends and troubled his life, and dared them all, water-spirits or mermaids, to come within the sweep of his sword.

Bertalda, meantime, wept for the loss of the ornament so very dear to her heart, and her tears were to Huldbrand as



All raised a scream of terror at the sight.—*p. 222.*

oil poured upon the flame of his fury; while Undine held her hand over the side of the boat, dipping it in the waves, softly murmuring to herself, and only at times interrupting her strange mysterious whisper to entreat her husband—

"Do not reprove me here, beloved; blame all others as you will, but not me. You know why!" And in truth, though he was trembling with excess of passion, he kept himself from any word directly against her.

She then brought up in her wet hand, which she had been holding under the waves, a coral necklace, of such exquisite beauty, such sparkling brilliancy, as dazzled the eyes of all who beheld it. "Take this," said she, holding it out kindly to Bertalda, "I have ordered it to be brought to make some amends for your loss; so do not grieve any more, poor child."

But the knight rushed between then, and snatching the beautiful ornament out of Undine's hand, hurled it back into the flood; and, mad with rage, exclaimed: "So, then, you have still a connection with them! In the name of all witches go and remain among them with your presents, you sorceress, and leave us human beings in peace!"

With fixed but streaming eyes, poor Undine gazed on him, her hand still stretched out, just as when she had so lovingly offered her brilliant gift to Bertalda. She then began to weep more and more, as if her heart would break, like an innocent tender child, cruelly aggrieved. At last, wearied out, she said: "Farewell, dearest, farewell. They shall do you no harm; only remain true, that I may have power to keep them from you. But I must go hence! go hence even in this early youth! Oh, woe, woe! what have you done! Oh, woe, woe!"

And she vanished over the side of the boat. Whether she plunged into the stream, or whether, like water melting into water, she flowed away with it, they knew not—her disappearance was like both and neither. But she was lost

in the Danube, instantly and completely; only little waves were yet whispering and sobbing around the boat, and they could almost be heard to say, "Oh, woe, woe! Ah, remain true! Oh, woe!"

But Huldbrand, in a passion of burning tears, threw himself upon the deck of the bark; and a deep swoon soon wrapped the wretched man in a blessed forgetfulness of misery.

Shall we call it a good or an evil thing, that our mourning has no long duration? I mean that deep mourning which comes from the very well-springs of our being, which so becomes one with the lost objects of our love that we hardly realize their loss, while our grief devotes itself religiously to the honouring of their image until we reach that bourne which they have already reached!

Truly all good men observe in a degree this religious devotion; but yet it soon ceases to be that first deep grief. Other and new images throng in, until, to our sorrow, we experience the vanity of all earthly things. Therefore I must say: Alas, that our mourning should be of such short duration!

The lord of Ringstetten experienced this; but whether for his good, we shall discover in the sequel of this history. At first he could do nothing but weep—weep as bitterly as the poor gentle Undine had wept when he snatched out of her hand that brilliant ornament, with which she so kindly wished to make amends for Bertalda's loss. And then he stretched his hand out, as she had done, and wept again like her, with renewed violence. He cherished a secret hope, that even the springs of life would at last become exhausted by weeping. And has not the like thought passed through the minds of many of us with a painful pleasure in times of sore affliction? Bertalda wept with him; and they lived together a long while at the castle of Ringstetten in undisturbed quiet, honouring the memory of

She vanished over the side of the boat.—*p.* 259.

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Undine, and having almost wholly forgotten their former attachment. And therefore the good Undine, about this time, often visited Huldbrand's dreams: she soothed him with soft and affectionate caresses, and then went away again, weeping in silence; so that when he awoke, he sometimes knew not how his cheeks came to be so wet—whether it was caused by *her* tears, or only by his own.

But as time advanced, these visions became less frequent, and the sorrow of the knight less keen; still he might never, perhaps, have entertained any other wish than thus quietly to think of Undine, and to speak of her, had not the old fisherman arrived unexpectedly at the castle, and earnestly insisted on Bertalda's returning with him as his child. He had received information of Undine's disappearance; and he was not willing to allow Bertalda to continue longer at the castle with the widowed knight. "For," said he, "whether my daughter loves me or not is at present what I care not to know; but her good name is at stake: and where that is the case, nothing else may be thought of."

This resolution of the old fisherman, and the fearful solitude that, on Bertalda's departure, threatened to oppress the knight in every hall and passage of the deserted castle, brought to light what had disappeared in his sorrow for Undine,—I mean, his attachment to the fair Bertalda; and this he made known to her father.

The fisherman had many objections to make to the proposed marriage. The old man had loved Undine with exceeding tenderness, and it was doubtful to his mind that the mere disappearance of his beloved child could be properly viewed as her death. But were it even granted that her corpse were lying stiff and cold at the bottom of the Danube, or swept away by the current to the ocean, still Bertalda had had some share in her death; and it was unfitting for her to step into the place of the poor injured wife. The fisherman, however, had felt a strong regard also

for the knight: this and the entreaties of his daughter, who had become much more gentle and respectful, as well as her tears for Undine, all exerted their influence; and he must at last have been forced to give up his opposition, for he remained at the castle without objection, and a messenger was sent off express to Father Heilmann, who in former and happier days had united Undine and Huldbrand, requesting him to come and perform the ceremony at the knight's second marriage.

Hardly had the holy man read through the letter from the lord of Ringstetten, ere he set out upon the journey, and made much greater dispatch on his way to the castle than the messenger from it had made in reaching him. Whenever his breath failed him in his rapid progress, or his old limbs ached with fatigue, he would say to himself:

"Perhaps I shall be able to prevent a sin; then sink not, withered body, before I arrive at the end of my journey!" And with renewed vigour he pressed forward, hurrying on without rest or repose, until, late one evening, he entered the shady court-yard of the castle of Ringstetten.

The betrothed were sitting side by side under the trees, and the aged fisherman in a thoughtful mood sat near them. The moment they saw Father Heilmann, they rose with a spring of joy, and pressed round him with eager welcome. But he, in a few words, asked the bridegroom to return with him into the castle; and when Huldbrand stood mute with surprise, and delayed complying with his earnest request, the pious preacher said to him—

"I do not know why I should want to speak to you in private; what I have to say as much concerns Bertalda and the fisherman as yourself; and what we must at some time hear, it is best to hear as soon as possible. Are you, then, so very certain, Knight Huldbrand, that your first wife is actually dead? I can hardly think it. I will say nothing, indeed, of the mysterious state in which she may be now

existing; I know nothing of it with certainty. But that she was a most devoted and faithful wife is beyond all dispute. And for fourteen nights past, she has appeared to me in a dream, standing at my bedside wringing her tender hands in anguish, and sighing out, 'Ah, prevent him, dear father! I am still living! Ah, save his life! Ah, save his soul!'

"I did not understand what this vision of the night could mean, then came your messenger; and I have now hastened hither, not to unite, but, as I hope, to separate what ought not to be joined together. Leave her, Huldbrand! leave him, Bertalda! He still belongs to another; and do you not see on his pale cheek his grief for his lost wife? That is not the look of a bridegroom; and the spirit says to me, that 'if you do not leave him you will never be happy!'"

The three felt in their inmost hearts that Father Heilmann spoke the truth; but they would not believe it. Even the old fisherman was so infatuated, that he thought it could not be otherwise than as they had latterly settled amongst themselves. They all, therefore, with a determined and gloomy eagerness, struggled against the representations and warnings of the priest, until, shaking his head and oppressed with sorrow, he finally quitted the castle, not choosing to accept their offered shelter even for a single night, or indeed so much as to taste a morsel of the refreshment they brought him. Huldbrand persuaded himself, however, that the priest was a mere visionary; and sent at daybreak to a monk of the nearest monastery, who, without scruple, promised to perform the ceremony in a few days.

IX
CHAPTER

IT was between night and dawn of day that Huldbrand was lying on his couch, half waking and half sleeping. Whenever he attempted to compose himself to sleep, a terror came upon him and scared him, as if his slumbers were haunted with spectres. But he made an effort to rouse himself fully. He felt fanned as by the wings of a swan, and lulled as by the murmuring of waters, till in sweet confusion of the senses he sank back into his state of half-consciousness.

At last, however, he must have fallen perfectly asleep; for he seemed to be lifted up by wings of the swans, and to be wafted far away over land and sea, while their music swelled on his ear most sweetly. "The music of the swan! the song of the swan!" he could not but repeat to himself every moment; "is it not a sure foreboding of death?" Probably, however, it had yet another meaning. All at once he seemed to be hovering over the Mediterranean Sea. A swan sang melodiously in his ear, that this *was* the Mediterranean Sea. And while he was looking down upon the waves, they became transparent as crystal, so that he could see through them to the very bottom.

At this a thrill of delight shot through him, for he could see Undine where she was sitting beneath the clear crystal dome. It is true she was weeping very bitterly, and looked much sadder than in those happy days when they lived together at the castle of Ringstetten, both on their arrival and afterward, just before they set out upon their fatal passage down the Danube. The knight could not help thinking upon all this with deep emotion, but it did not appear that Undine was aware of his presence.

Kühleborn had meanwhile approached her, and was about to reprove her for weeping, when she drew herself up, and looked upon him with an air so majestic and commanding, that he almost shrank back.

"Although I now dwell here beneath the waters," said she, "yet I have brought my soul with me. And therefore I may weep, little as you can know what such tears are. They are blessed, as everything is blessed to one gifted with a true soul."

He shook his head incredulously; and after some thought, replied, "And yet, niece, you are subject to our laws, as a being of the same nature with ourselves; and should *he* prove unfaithful to you and marry again, you are obliged to take away his life."

"He remains a widower to this very hour," replied Undine, "and I am still dear to his sorrowful heart."

"He is, however, betrothed," said Kühleborn, with a laugh of scorn; "and let only a few days wear away, and then comes the priest with his nuptial blessing; and then you must go up to the death of the husband with two wives."

"I have not the power," returned Undine, with a smile. "I have sealed up the fountain securely against myself and all of my race."

"Still, should he leave his castle," said Kühleborn, "or should he once allow the fountain to be uncovered, what then? for he thinks little enough of these things."

"For that very reason," said Undine, still smiling amid her tears, "for that very reason he is at this moment hovering in spirit over the Mediterranean Sea, and dreaming of the warning which our discourse gives him. I thoughtfully planned all this."

That instant, Kühleborn, inflamed with rage, looked up at the knight, wrathfully threatened him, stamped on the ground, and then shot like an arrow beneath the waves. He seemed to swell in his fury to the size of a whale. Again the swans began to sing, to wave their wings and fly; the knight seemed to soar away over mountains and streams, and at last to alight at Castle Ringstetten, and to awake on his couch.

Upon his couch he actually did awake; and his attendant entering at the same moment, informed him that Father Heilmann was still lingering in the neighbourhood; that he had the evening before met with him in the forest, where he was sheltering himself under a hut, which he had formed by interweaving the branches of trees, and covering them with moss and fine brushwood; and that to the question "What he was doing there, since he would not give the marriage blessing?" his answer was—

"There are many other blessings than those given at marriages; and though I did not come to officiate at the wedding, I may still officiate at a very different solemnity. All things have their seasons; we must be ready for them all. Besides, marrying and mourning are by no means so very unlike; as every one not wilfully blinded must know full well."

The knight made many bewildered reflections on these words and on his dream. But it is very difficult to give up a thing which we have once looked upon as certain; so all continued as had been arranged previously.

Should I relate to you how passed the marriage-feast at Castle Ringstetten, it would be as if you saw a heap of bright and pleasant things, but all overspread with a black mourning crape, through whose darkening veil their brilliancy would appear but a mockery of the nothingness of all earthly joys.

It was not that any spectral delusion disturbed the scene of festivity; for the castle, as we well know, had been secured against the mischief of water-spirits. But the knight, the fisherman, and all the guests were unable to banish the feeling that the chief personage of the feast was still wanting, and that this chief personage could be no other than the gentle and beloved Undine.

Whenever a door was heard to open, all eyes were involuntarily turned in that direction; and if it was nothing but the steward with new dishes, or the cupbearer with a supply of wine of higher flavour than the last, they again looked down in sadness and disappointment, while the flashes of wit and merriment which had been passing at times from one to another, were extinguished by tears of mournful remembrance.

The bride was the least thoughtful of the company, and therefore the most happy; but even to her it sometimes seemed strange that she should be sitting at the head of

the table, wearing a green wreath and gold-embroidered robe, while Undine was lying a corpse, stiff and cold, at the bottom of the Danube, or carried out by the current into the ocean. For ever since her father had suggested something of this sort, his words were continually sounding in her ear; and this day, in particular, they would neither fade from her memory, nor yield to other thoughts.

Evening had scarcely arrived, when the company returned to their homes; not dismissed by the impatience of the bridegroom, as wedding parties are sometimes broken up, but constrained solely by heavy sadness and forebodings of evil. Bertalda retired with her maidens, and the knight with his attendants, to undress, but there was no gay laughing company of bridesmaids and bridesmen at this mournful festival.

Bertalda wished to awaken more cheerful thoughts; she ordered her maidens to spread before her a brilliant set of jewels, a present from Huldbrand, together with rich apparel and veils, that she might select from among them the brightest and most beautiful for her dress in the morning. The attendants rejoiced at this opportunity of pouring forth good wishes and promises of happiness to their young mistress, and failed not to extol the beauty of the bride with the most glowing eloquence. This went on for a long time, until Bertalda at last, looking in a mirror, said with a sigh—

"Ah, but do you not see plainly how freckled I am growing? Look here on the side of my neck."

They looked at the place, and found the freckles, indeed, as their fair mistress had said; but they called them mere beauty spots, the faintest touches of the sun, such as would only heighten the whiteness of her delicate complexion. Bertalda shook her head, and still viewed them as a blemish.

"And I could remove them," she said at last, sighing. "But the castle fountain is covered, from which I formerly

used to have that precious water, so purifying to the skin. Oh, had I this evening only a single flask of it!"

"Is that all?" cried an alert waiting-maid, laughing as she glided out of the apartment.

"She will not be so foolish," said Bertalda, well-pleased and surprised, "as to cause the stone cover of the fountain to be taken off this very evening?" That instant they heard the tread of men passing along the court-yard, and could see from the window where the officious maiden was leading them directly up to the fountain, and that they carried levers and other instruments on their shoulders.

"It is certainly my will," said Bertalda with a smile, "if it does not take them too long." And pleased with the thought, that a word from her was now sufficient to accomplish what had formerly been refused with a painful reproof, she looked down upon their operations in the bright moonlit castle-court.

The men raised the enormous stone with an effort; some one of the number indeed would occasionally sigh, when he recollected they were destroying the work of their former beloved mistress. Their labour, however, was much lighter than they had expected. It seemed as if some power from within the fountain itself aided them in raising the stone.

"It appears," said the workmen to one another in astonishment, "as if the confined water had become a springing fountain." And the stone rose more and more, and, almost without the assistance of the work-people, rolled slowly down upon the pavement with a hollow sound. But an appearance from the opening of the fountain filled them with awe, as it rose like a white column of water; at first they imagined it really to be a fountain, until they perceived the rising form to be a pale female, veiled in white. She wept bitterly, raised her hands above her head, wringing them sadly as with slow and solemn step she moved

toward the castle. The servants shrank back, and fled from the spring, while the bride, pale and motionless with horror, stood with her maidens at the window. When the figure had now come close beneath their room, it looked up to them sobbing, and Bertalda thought she recognized through the veil the pale features of Undine. But the mourning form passed on, sad, reluctant, and lingering, as if going to the place of execution. Bertalda screamed to her maids to call the knight; not one of them dared to stir from her place; and even the bride herself became again mute, as if trembling at the sound of her own voice.

While they continued standing at the window, motionless as statues, the mysterious wanderer had entered the castle, ascended the well-known stairs, and traversed the well-known halls in silent tears. Alas, how different had she once passed through these rooms!

The knight had in the meantime dismissed his attendants. Half-undressed and in deep dejection, he was standing before a large mirror, a wax taper burned dimly beside him. At this moment some one tapped at his door very, very softly. Undine had formerly tapped in this way, when she was playing some of her endearing wiles.

"It is all an illusion!" said he to himself. "I must to my nuptial bed."

"You must indeed, but to a cold one!" he heard a voice, choked with sobs, repeat from without; and then he saw in the mirror, that the door of his room was slowly, slowly opened, and the white figure entered, and gently closed it behind her.

"They have opened the spring," said she in a low tone; "and now I am here, and you must die."

He felt, in his failing breath, that this must indeed be; but covering his eyes with his hands, he cried: "Do not in my death-hour, do not make me mad with terror. If that veil conceals hideous features, do not lift it! Take my life, but let me not see you."

Veiled in white.—*p.* 271.

Copyright 1896 by Joseph William Darton.

"Alas!" replied the pale figure, "will you not then look upon me once more? I am as fair now as when you wooed me on the island!"

"Oh, if it indeed were so," sighed Huldbrand, "and that I might die by a kiss from you!"

"Most willingly, my own love," said she. She threw back her veil; heavenly fair shone forth her pure countenance. Trembling with love and the awe of approaching death, the knight leant towards her. She kissed him with a holy kiss; but she relaxed not her hold, pressing him more closely in her arms, and weeping as if she would weep away her soul. Tears rushed into the knight's eyes, while a thrill both of bliss and agony shot through his heart, until he at last expired, sinking softly back from her fair arms upon the pillow of his couch a corpse.

"I have wept him to death!" said she to some domestics, who met her in the ante-chamber; and passing through the terrified group, she went slowly out, and disappeared in the fountain.

X
CHAPTER

FATHER HEILMANN had returned to the castle as soon as the death of the lord of Ringstetten was made known in the neighbourhood ; and he arrived at the very hour when the monk who had married the unfortunate couple was hurrying from the door, overcome with dismay and horror.

When Father Heilmann was informed of this, he replied, "It is all well ; and now come the duties of my office, in which I have no need of an assistant."

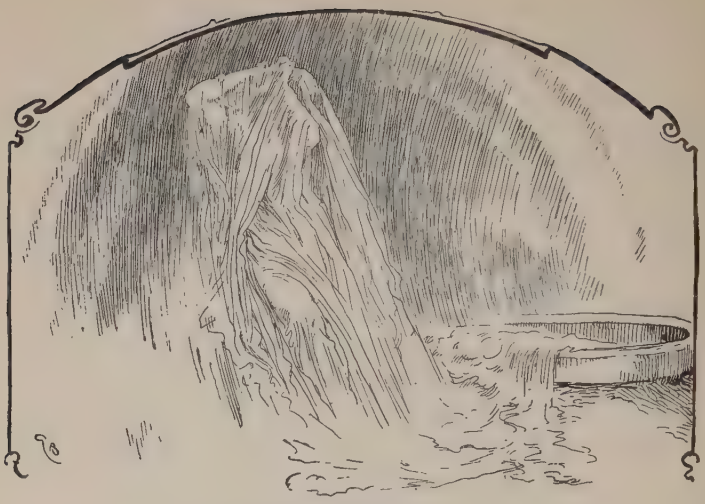
He then began to console the bride, now a widow, though with little benefit to her worldly and thoughtless spirit.

The old fisherman, on the other hand, though severely afflicted, was far more resigned to the fate of his son-in-law

and daughter; and while Bertalda could not refrain from accusing Undine as a murderess and sorceress, the old man calmly said, "After all, it could not happen otherwise. I see nothing in it but the judgment of God; and no one's heart was more pierced by the death of Huldbrand than she who was obliged to work it, the poor forsaken Undine!"

He then assisted in arranging the funeral solemnities as suited the rank of the deceased. The knight was to be interred in the village church-yard, in whose consecrated ground were the graves of his ancestors; a place which they, as well as himself, had endowed with rich privileges and gifts. His shield and helmet lay upon his coffin, ready to be lowered with it into the grave, for Lord Huldbrand of Ringstetten had died the last of his race. The mourners began their sorrowful march, chanting their melancholy songs beneath the calm unclouded heaven; Father Heilmann preceded the procession, bearing a high crucifix, while the inconsolable Bertalda followed, supported by her aged father.

Then they suddenly saw in the midst of the mourning females in the widow's train, a snow-white figure closely veiled, and wringing its hands in the wild vehemence of sorrow. Those next to whom it moved, seized with a secret dread, started back or on one side; and owing to their movements, the others, next to whom the white stranger now came, were terrified still more, so as to produce confusion in the funeral train. Some of the military escort ventured to address the figure, and attempt to remove it from the procession, but it seemed to vanish from under their hands, and yet was immediately seen advancing again, with slow and solemn step, among the followers of the body. At last, in consequence of the shrinking away of the attendants, it came close behind Bertalda. It now moved so slowly, that the widow was not aware of its presence, and it walked meekly and humbly behind her undisturbed.

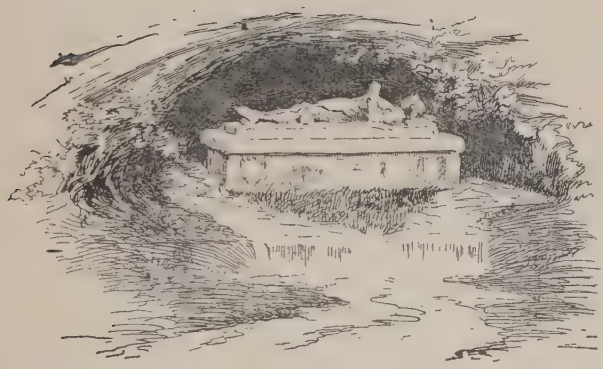


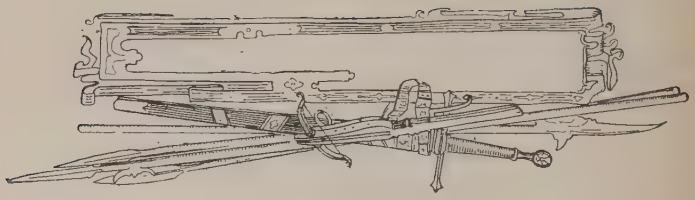
A snow-white figure closely veiled.—*p.* 277.

This continued until they came to the church-yard, where the procession formed a circle round the open grave. Then it was that Bertalda perceived her unbidden companion, and, half in anger and half in terror, she commanded her to depart from the knight's place of final rest. But the veiled female, shaking her head with a gentle denial, raised her hands towards Bertalda in lowly supplication, by which she was greatly moved, and could not but remember with tears how Undine had shown such sweetness of spirit on the Danube when she held out to her the coral necklace.

Father Heilmann now motioned with his hand, and gave order for all to observe perfect stillness, that they might breathe a prayer of silent devotion over the body, upon which earth had already been thrown. Bertalda knelt without speaking; and all knelt, even the grave-diggers, who had now finished their work. But when they arose, the white stranger had disappeared. On the spot where

she had knelt, a little spring, of silver brightness, was gushing out from the green turf, and it kept swelling and flowing onward with a low murmur, till it almost encircled the mound of the knight's grave; it then continued its course, and emptied itself into a calm lake, which lay by the side of the consecrated ground. Even to this day, the inhabitants of the village point out the spring; and hold fast the belief that it is the poor deserted Undine, who in this manner still fondly encircles her beloved in her arms.





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'Old King Cole was a merry old soul.'—*p.* 1.

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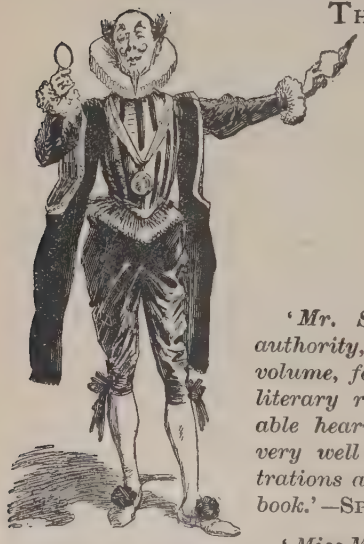

'Some have greatness thrust upon them.' *p.* xiv.

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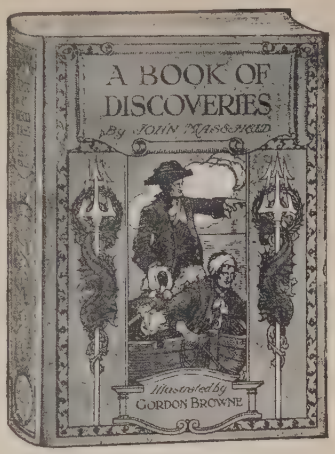

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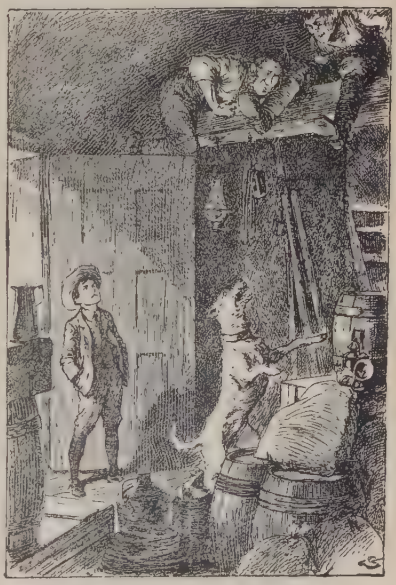

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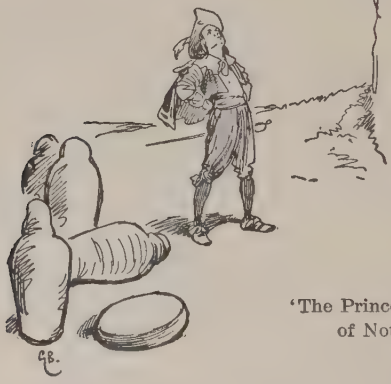

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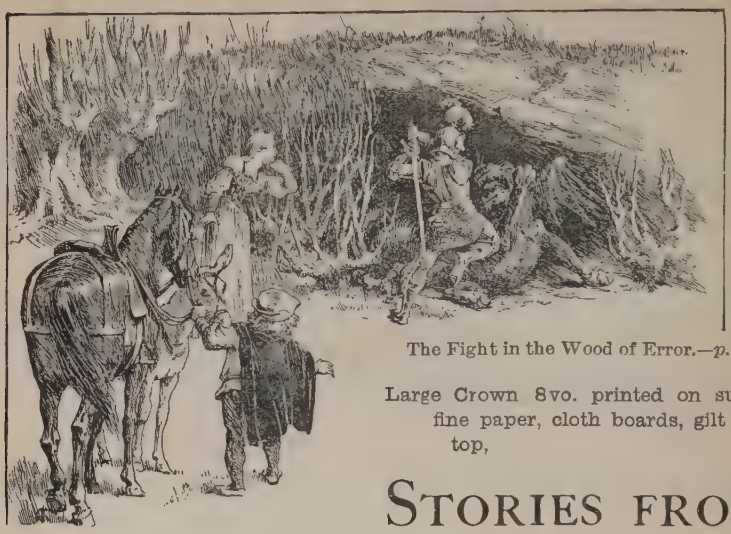

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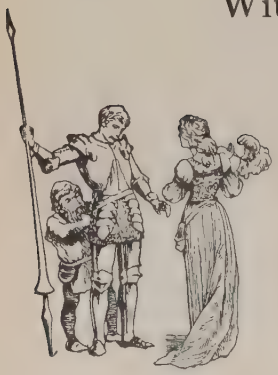

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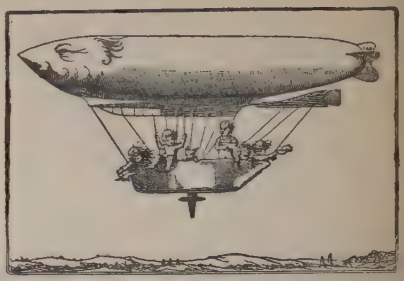

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